



WISCONSIN
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OF CHRIST



Embrace the Tough Stuff

by Lisa Hart

We have made it through the cold and somewhat dark days of winter. The days are getting longer, the temperature (on most days) is warmer, and all around us there are signs of renewal and new life. The transition from winter to spring coincides with our journey through Lent to the celebration of Easter. I find that the signs of new life around us add to the joy felt while celebrating the Resurrection and the hope that new life brings. We are filled with a sense of renewal and restoration.



As I reflect on this transition, I'm aware that many of us struggle through winter. Even those who love winter, myself included, are ready to rush into spring as soon as the first signs of the new season appear. It is much the same with Lent and Easter. We find it difficult to allow ourselves to sit in the darkness and solitude of Lent. Too often, we rush toward the joy of Easter, sometimes refusing to observe Lent. We forget the importance of Lent.

Lent is a time for self-examination and reflection. Just as Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, this is our time to be in the wilderness. It is too easy for us to get caught up in the busyness of our lives. Lent gives us the space to slow down, examine our lives, and reflect on our connection with God. We may recognize ways we have fallen short, but more importantly, we can focus on the ways to strengthen our relationship with God and recommit to living our lives as God calls us to live. This prepares our hearts and minds to truly celebrate the joy of Easter and new life.

The spiritual practice of observing Lent can also prepare us for times in our lives when we are facing the wilderness. Observing Lent as part of a faith community can serve as a reminder that there are times when we need to face the wilderness together. This preparation and reminder are important because the human tendency is to push aside the "tough stuff"; to ignore problems until they go away. We resent reminders that some in our community, perhaps ourselves, are struggling. We want to focus only on the joy of Easter.

Jesus set an example for us that does not allow us to do this, however. Jesus did not turn away from the “tough stuff.” He was present with those who suffered. He listened to their stories without turning away, and he offered them hope. As followers of Jesus, we are called to do the same. On April 24th, congregations in the Wisconsin Conference UCC have the opportunity to do this by observing Break the Silence Sunday. For many, this will be difficult, but it is necessary. We need to ask ourselves why survivors rarely share their stories within the faith community. If they aren’t turning to the church, where are they turning? How can we make our church a safe place...a sanctuary for people in their most difficult times? The liturgy and other resources for this Sunday are one step toward creating space in our congregations for survivors to find the hope Jesus offers; to feel a sense of renewal and of being restored. The next, and most important, step is to allow ourselves to be in that space with the survivors in our faith community. Jesus modeled for us the way to do this. We just need to follow that example and not rush past the “tough stuff.” In doing this, not only will we know the joy of Easter, but we will be sharing that joy with the survivors among us.