

It's Lent! Woo Hoo! (Yeah, Right)

We are rapidly approaching everyone's favorite season of the church year—Lent; that wonderful, uplifting season where we are reminded of our mortality—from dust we came, and to dust we shall return. In case you are not familiar with this season, Lent is a period of fasting (giving up a particular food, meal, or habit), repentance, and reflection traditionally observed by Catholics and some Protestant denominations in preparation for Easter. The season lasts 40 days, and different churches calculate those 40 days in different ways. In Western Christianity, Lent typically begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Holy Saturday (the Saturday before Easter Sunday), not counting the weekends.

Yep—fasting, repentance, and reflection; sounds like a party to me! Yeah, right!

In fact, the traditionally somber, penitent, and “Catholic” nature of Lent has led some Protestant denominations to avoid it altogether. After all, aren't we supposed to be repenting and giving up bad habits throughout the year? Some communities of faith comprised primarily of marginalized people (lgbtq folks, for example) also steer clear of the more traditional aspects of Lent. After all, don't we get beat up by society enough already without doing it to ourselves?

I can see the logic in these positions. At the same time, to me, they represent opposite ends of the spectrum of not only Lent, but also of life in general. That is, some people believe our time on earth is limited and we have to constantly be on guard lest we “backslide” right into Hell. Sure, God loves us—as long as we behave. For others, God's love means we can do whatever we please—eat, drink and be merry! For tomorrow we may die! To hell with all those wet blankets who preach their versions of clean and responsible living!

Here's a thought: Maybe Lent isn't either/or. Maybe Lent is both/and. Yes, we are mortal, and one day we will die. That is not only a theological statement; it is also reality. So, rather than despair about this fact, why not be thankful for the gift of life, enjoy it, *and* reflect on what we can do to make a positive difference in the world while we are here, using the gifts God has given us?

Yes, we all make mistakes, too—not one of us is perfect. So, rather than beating ourselves up over this reality, why not accept responsibility for our actions, do what we can do to correct our mistakes, *and* begin the process of letting those mistakes go and moving on in our journeys?

Who knows? If we can begin to see Lent through this “both/and” lens, maybe one day we will all be able to really *celebrate*, rather than *tolerate* Lent. At any rate, it sure beats the heck out of sitting around in sack cloth and ashes for 40 days.

And the best news is, with this plan you don't have to give up your favorite food and/or drink.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Danny