

Celebrating Lent

Lord may the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be acceptable in your sight. AMEN

My cousin proudly calls herself a “snowbird”. Now, a snowbird is a person who migrates from the colder northern parts of North America to warmer southern locales during the winter. Before the first snowflake is on the roof of her house, my cousin is heading south to enjoy the warm beaches.

Some years ago, I visited her for a week at the beach. I believe there is nothing better than enjoying the quiet waves and being able to calm down from everyday life. You can feel the presence of the Lord during long walks on the beach. Yet, during one visit, I woke up every night due to heavy surf pounding the shore close to our dwelling. It’s loud crashing waves made me fearful, and I lost hours of sleep.

A part of Psalm 93 proclaims:

³LORD, the seas raise, the seas raise their voice. The seas raise up their pounding waves.

⁴The sound of the water is loud; the ocean waves are powerful, but the LORD above is much greater. (New Century Version)

During those sleepless times, I did not remember that our great God is always with us, and he remembers and values creation within a covenant relationship.

Today’s reading from Genesis, highlights the fact that God would always remember his people, even during the pounding of the seas. Noah had enough faith in God to build an ark, collect both family and animals, and seal them into a confined residence for safety while the earth was being pounded by the seas. **For Noah believed in God’s call to him, he followed through on it, and accepted God’s covenant relationship on behalf of all**

creation. As one scholar stated concisely, “Noah was fully responsive to the Lord and let God be God”.

God through his covenant, acknowledged that all of creation is of value. We hear an echo of this in the gospel of Luke when Jesus states: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? **Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight.** Even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6)

In our gospel reading today from Mark, Jesus has accepted a call of baptism, followed through with it, and has extended an invitation to a **new covenant relationship with all of God’s people.** This covenant will not only affirm God’s care for his people; it will ultimately include a personal spiritual relationship for humanity with the Lord.

Some commentaries state that today’s gospel passage contain Jesus’ very first sermon in the words: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.*” I have to admit, I like short sermons so that idea appealed to me. However, upon considering the rest of what is written in Mark’s gospel; I came to the conclusion that all of Jesus’ words and actions in Mark back up this one sentence. So what might be considered a “short” sermon evolves into a very “long” one.

The kingdom of God is near. So many people had longed to hear those words and are still longing for them. In Isaiah 64 verse 1, the prophet **gently** proclaims the hope of a closer relationship with God. He says: “O that you, God, would tear open the heavens and come down.” While Bible Scholar, Joel Marcus **forcefully** puts it another way: “God has ripped the heavens irrevocably apart at Jesus’ baptism never to shut them. Through this gracious gash in the universe, God has poured forth his Spirit into the earthly realm.”

Jesus finishes his first sentence in Mark’s gospel by asking people to “*repent and believe in the good news*”. Jesus is offering God’s mercy and asking for their belief in his words and actions.

I believe that in this first proclamation by Jesus we, too, are called to renew our relationship with the Lord. I see these as words of celebration – words of new beginnings – words that light up our universe!

Aren't we also called to **celebrate** our Lenten Journey? Yes, I did say **celebrate**. William Arthur Ward, a Methodist Educator, proposes that we can celebrate Lent by both **fasting and feasting**. He suggests that we are called to fast from discontent; feast on gratitude... Fast from anger; feast on patience... Fast from emphasis on differences; feast on the unity of all life... Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation... Fast from negatives; feast on affirmatives... Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others... Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness... Fast from discouragement; feast on hope... Fast from problems that overwhelm; feast on prayer that strengthens...

We need these Lenten weeks in order to obtain a heightened awareness of the importance of spiritual space in our lives so that we can discover the beauty of our relationship with the Lord and those in our community.

During Lent, we are called to remember that we are not alone in this walk with God. We are called to remember that we are caregivers to each other. As a community in Christ, we are walking together toward Easter Sunday. We can allow our ears to assist in this by listening intently to God in word and liturgy. In addition, beginning this Sunday, and spanning four more, our church forums will be on *Walking through Lent together: Lenten practices*.

May the Lord support us in living out what he asks of us during this Lenten Season as we renew our personal and community covenant with him.

And may each of you have a fruitful Lenten Celebration!

I pray this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN