

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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OBSERVANCE

the invitation to a holy Lent

by Drew Downs

On Ash Wednesday, we are invited to mark this season with intention. To follow a pattern of devotion that goes back to the earliest days of the church. This means these patterns are older than 95% of what we think of as “traditional.”

So what does “observing” a holy Lent mean?

We might say that we optimize our learning by attuning ourselves and our desires to

God’s through prayer, abstinence, and self-examination. It means halting the things we do on auto-pilot, taking time to listen to what God is trying to say, and looking at our spiritual selves in the mirror.

That’s the what. Here’s the why. This is the season we prepare for change. To be changed. To let others change. And most of all, to witness resurrection in our community. So we can seek resurrection everywhere.

EPIPHANY

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Ashes

On Ash Wednesday, we remind one another of our mortality. As customs go, this is an odd one. And to do so with ashes on our foreheads is more so. Because that oddity is the point.

We don't like talking about death. So we push ourselves to do it this day. And we like fitting in. So we mark ourselves.

What we're doing is risking popularity. For the sake of humility.

Christians have wrestled with relevancy for centuries. We want safety and tend to miss our historic power. We long for full churches and outward signs that we are good, successful, and popular.

And then we walk into church and remember that we are dust—and will return to the dust. We aren't all that. We're just that.

It is odd then, how we crave this. How much time we spend avoiding our mortality only to need to face it.

We enter Lent compelled by humility in a culture of bravado. And we are insecure in a time of arrogance. Because these reminders actually bring hope. Hope for our moment of need; for our community; for our world. Hope for new beginnings and opportunities. Because we already know that death is not the end. It brings new beginnings.

With love,
Drew

LENT

2024

FOR SUNDAY

First Sunday of Lent

February 18, 2024

Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

LENT

Reflection

Don't you want to know more? About the Spirit, the driving of Jesus into the wilderness, what transpires out there, and even the arrest of John? So much happens so quickly! And we only get a glimpse of it.

The evangelist doesn't want us to dwell on these stories as much as our curiosity does. But they give us some hints: a taste of what is there. But not enough to linger *too* long.

We get the encapsulation of Jesus's call story in a half-dozen verses—and a vision for discipleship. As in Christ's discipleship to God!

The baptism with water and the Holy Spirit leads to a season of temptation and learning. A time when he learns to be at peace with the wild beasts and with the angels. And then, when he returns to the "real world," he is greeted with the mantle of John the Baptizer: to preach repentance and proclaim the Good News.

This offers us a glimpse of the nature of divine relationship in discipleship, calling, and sacrifice. In it, we see a Christly pattern of devotion and love that resembles the path the disciples will themselves follow over the next fifteen chapters. And the pattern Christians have followed for nearly two thousand years.

That relationship requires commitment, trust, and hope as much as it requires love and the willingness to give everything. And to offer these, not only when we are secure, healthy, and happy. But also when we feel tested or tempted. When it feels like the wilderness will never end.

The irony, of course, is what lies after the wilderness is service. Which is often a different kind of wilderness. But at least we know the Way.

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