

According to Mark . . . March 2017

Another Lenten season is upon us and it means many things depending on how we grew up and how we have experienced our lives to date. And while I don't think any of us would consider Lent a time to "celebrate", as it is in Eastertide or Christmastide, it is a time of 40 days prior to Easter that require our attention. Wait, that number 40...that sounds familiar, doesn't it?

The Bible has this annoying habit of tying its parts together in a great arc of revelation of God's relationship with God's chosen people. So while the Old and New Testaments often refer to one another in various passages (Jesus frequently refers to Isaiah, the Psalms, and the first 5 books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch), it also repeats certain numbers. Seven (the number of days of creation, the number of cities and seals on the Scroll in Revelation, Jesus performing 7 miracles on Sundays) is the number that represents perfection. Three (the Trinity, Jesus praying three times in Gethsemane, Jesus being denied three times by Peter; and then forgiven three times on the lakeshore; Christ rising on the 3rd day) is the number that represents completeness.

Forty is mentioned a LOT in the Bible. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights on Noah, who waited 40 days until he opened a window on the Ark. Goliath roamed for 40 days before doing battle with David. Moses was on the mountain for 40 days with God (twice, but who's counting?). The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness until they found the promised land. And Jesus was in the wilderness 40 days fasting and praying, and was gone 40 days before appearing again to the disciples (except in the Gospel of John, where he appears the night of the Resurrection, but that's another story for another day).

It's no surprise, then, that for a largely illiterate early church, these timeframes were important reminders that what they were being asked to do—fast, pray, and focus on God—was not something they did alone or was never done for the first time. Other larger than life and holy figures had grown closer to God on their own journeys of 40 days.

So what will we do with our 40 days and focus on God? Can we "fast" in a way that does not endanger us (many, for health reasons, cannot or should not fast) but still gives us a sense that we're giving something up? Can we put down our mobile phones for 40 minutes just after our workday and talk with a friend in need, or must we be that connected with Facebook? Can we sit in quiet contemplation for 40 minutes of intentional centering meditation or prayer? Can we do something with \$40 that helps another person or supports a cause that we care deeply and richly about but to which we have not yet given? Can we design some other way of doing a "40" reflection that makes our hearts in solidarity with those who have given something more of themselves to God?

As I've said before, whether you're giving something up, or giving something more, do something this Lenten Season. Give your intentions some time to sit with your heart, mind, and Spirit, and you might be surprised what you learn of yourself. It might lead you to do One New Thing at TCC this year, our call to action in September for all our members and friends. It might lead you to Trything something that you find that might spark a spiritual journey here at TCC or another charity that is helping build God's Kingdom. Just do something, starting Ash Wednesday, March 1, where you live outside yourself. I promise it won't be wasted time. It will instead be Holy Time, giving back to the one who gives us nothing BUT time.

Blessings on your Lenten Journeys,

Pastor Mark