

According to Mark . . . February 2018

What do we need for our lives, and where can we find it?

Too often we are fooled into focusing on the wrong things. Our business leaders might say that we need better trained workers located wherever they decide their businesses are needed. Our military leaders might say that we need a well-prepared fighting force to respond wherever they decide that their armies, navies, or air forces are needed. Our current political leaders might say that we need to pass this law or that, extending new rights to a privileged few when protection from discrimination for the many are needed.

And we fool ourselves that we can find a needy worldly solution for our needful Spiritual longings.

The Christmas Season we just passed was like that; we give gifts to one another that are anticipated and maybe expected, and by this time, the magic of that worldly fulfillment has worn down and we want something else to make us feel whole. But as we think that way, we are thinking wrongly. For what we need is already amongst us, already within us. We just don't know it. Which is why we need Lent.

Lent is a time when Christians *separate from the world*; when we find out our faith is not just a feel-good, self-help religion but one that answers the deepest questions of life and eternity. We focus on why God took human form and came to be with us. Why? Here's what one of my favorite mystics, Richard Rohr, has to say on that question:

*Jesus was meant to be a game-changer for the human psyche and for religion itself. But when we begin negatively, or focused on a problem, we never get off the hamster wheel of shame, separation, and violence. Rather than focusing on sin, Jesus - "the crucified One" - pointed us toward a primal solidarity with the very suffering of God and thus of all creation. This changes everything. Change the starting point, and you change the trajectory, and even the final goal! Love is the beginning, the way itself, and the final consummation.*

We have an opportunity to focus on God's love for us, even as we screw up the planet given us, the creatures who inhabit it (including us!), and our relationships at every level. Perhaps that's because we don't feel love for one another the way God loved us. Perpetually. Unconditionally. Everlastingly.

Lent, then, is the opportunity for us to retreat from our worldly longings and pleasures and to prepare our hearts to once and for all bask in the glow of God's grace for each of us. Because God loved us first, we are able to love. Our love, God-centered, allows us to give up anything and everything to focus our full hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits on **GIVING** love to others. Which, if we stick with it, will give us love in return. I've experienced that many times in my life, and again as I recover from my injuries. Love given is love returned. So this Lenten season, rather than give up something, let's try changing the perspective, or as Richard Rohr says, the starting point. For this lent, let's honestly examine our lives in light of God's Word; start an examination of conscience by praying Psalm 139, verse 23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and

lead me in the way everlasting.” And see what comes back. Lent, and faith, is not a destination, it’s a journey. Journey with me this Lent in knowing that we can be whole, right here, right now, with not giving up our tiny baubles and wants, but seeking with our true selves God’s love that is already present.

*Pastor Mark*