

## Lenten Practices

“For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human?...For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.”—1 Corinthians 3:3b-4, 9

As I sit here in Pennsylvania preparing for another Lenten season, I’ve been thinking about the role that this holy forty-day journey plays in our life together. Many of us will approach these days thinking about spiritual discipline—maybe we will read something new or say different prayers this season, maybe we will give something up, in order to provide focus on the parts of our hearts that desperately need a measure of God’s love and healing. Each year I tend to go into these forty days with some thought about what I need from God—whether that be help, strength, forgiveness, etc. I think that many of us do this—we make Lent about a personal journey with God.

But as I prepare for this Lent in particular, I’ve been thinking about how my Lent last year began. On Transfiguration Sunday (the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday) in 2019, I preached and led worship in a congregation that I had never really met before here in Pennsylvania—you. I was in a new place in front of new people, and I didn’t yet know what the road before me held. Neither did you. After worship I sat alone in a room praying desperately as you, these new people in the other room, cast a vote regarding whether or not you felt like God was calling me to be your pastor. It was one of the most vulnerable moments of my life. When a small group of people came to announce to me the magnificent results—you are called here! —I began to cry. What had been a moment of loneliness was transformed into a moment where God reminded me that I was not alone in this work of ministry—I had all of you as partners, ready to work alongside one another for the sake of God’s hope and good news in the world. You didn’t know me, but you knew that God had knit us together.

It was a few hours later that I heard from my parents that the news had reached my home congregation in Dubuque, IA, and that they had celebrated amongst one another in my absence on that day. Friends, what a beautiful depiction of what church is! God has pulled us together in love and relationship, and even though that other Lutheran church is far away from us in miles, we all celebrated together that day. Even though you had never met these Iowans, you celebrated with them that day. Last year, our Lent began with a reminder that we are not alone in the work of God’s church. God makes us one for the sake of the world.

So, as we prepare for this Lenten season, I invite us to think more about what we need from God than about just what I need from God. To reflect on how our hearts are tied up with the hearts of all the baptized. We are a part of something bigger than ourselves, something that spans across generations, miles, borders. This Lenten season, I invite you into prayer with me that God would help us see that we belong to one another and help us lean into that mutual love and support more wholly, intentionally, and kindly. That God would empower God’s church to see that we are not bodies, but one body. As we face division and splintering in our world, I pray that God would use these forty days to reform our hearts—that we would learn to see ourselves as part of this larger project of love and hope in the world.

*Peace, Pastor Marissa Becklin*