



Greetings Church!

February 17, 2021

Today is Ash Wednesday. It is a Christian holy day of prayer and fasting. It is preceded by Shrove Tuesday which is a day of feasting. (Under normal circumstances we would have had a pancake supper at the church last evening to celebrate Shrove Tuesday!) Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent followed by six weeks of penitence before Easter. "Penance" is the act of repentance. So, the Season of Lent in the Christian Church is a time for Christians to consider those things they have done that have separated them from God, their neighbors and themselves. It is a time to confess their wrongs and do acts of penance (repentance) to restore themselves to right relationship with God and others.

Christians often receive ashes on their foreheads in the sign of the Cross on Ash Wednesday to unite them with the sufferings of Christ. The ashes are typically burnt palms from the previous Palm Sunday. Hence the palm fronds we used to hail Jesus coming into Jerusalem during last year's Palm Sunday celebration are now used as a symbol of our solidarity with Jesus this year during Lent.

The interplay between suffering and celebration is re-enacted each year in the church calendar to remind Christians that the journey of faith includes times of suffering and times of celebration; times of pain and times of healing; times of Cross bearing and times of Resurrection. Such is the nature of the life of faith.

I invite you to see this Lenten Season as a time for your annual "Spiritual" check-up. Like your annual "physical" check-up, in doing so I suspect that you will find parts of your spiritual life that need attention--as well as parts of it that are healthy. For example, you may find that you have not kept up with your commitment to make silent spaces in your life to commune with God. Or you may find that you have been too spiritually isolated from others both in terms of prayer and in doing good deeds for others.

You should also give attention to those times over the past year when your faith grew stronger. Take time to remember those experiences that strengthened your faith in the living God and led you to acts of love and service to others.

The point being: do not turn your Lenten journey into a time of self-flagellation and self-criticism. Yes, Lent calls us to honestly reflect on those areas in our lives where repentance is needed. But do not beat yourself into submission over them. The Lenten Journey was never intended to be a road to perdition and damnation. It was meant to be a road to self-examination that leads us to renewed faith in God's goodness no matter what we face in life--and to salvation!

In I John 4:7-9 we read,

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him."

However, you journey through this season of Lent, know that God loves you.

Blessings, Your Pastor, John