

Sermon Preached by Rev'd Glenn Maytum

1st March 2020

LENT 1

We all need Epic Reminders. There is a large German grocery store with advertisements showing children dressed in jumpers labelled "Wednesday" and "Saturday" and a young girl duct-taped to the front door of the refrigerator as Epic Reminders.

Epic Reminders are often needed by men to remember birthdays or wedding anniversaries.

And, the church uses Epic Reminders, too. The most recent was Advent- to remind us to prepare for Christmas; and, now there is Lent- to remind us to prepare for Easter.

And, I like a church that does that! Rather than just the "same old, same old" every week, we are able to be part of a thinking, changing environment, just like life.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. The season of Autumn in the southern hemisphere means it is now springtime in the northern hemisphere. The word "lent" comes from the Old English word for "springtime" and my Dutch friends told me "Spring", in Dutch, is "Lente".

The season lasts for 40 days: near enough to be a literal interpretation of Jesus' sojourn in the desert that we have just read about in today's Gospel [Mathew 4:2]. We really don't know the actual time Jesus was in the desert because forty is, of course, figurative speech for "long time". It is not unlike using the expression "one-hundred-and-one", when we really don't know how many, but there will be a lot.

Noah was in the rain for forty days (and, forty nights); the people of God wandered in the desert for forty years with Moses; it is forty days from Easter until Jesus' ascension. We have just seen the people quarantined during the coronavirus outbreak: and QUARANTINE comes from the French word for FORTY- a long time to be away from other people!

On Ash Wednesday we were reminded this season of Lent was originally *observed by those who were preparing for baptism at Easter and by those who were to be restored to the communion from which they had been separated, by sin. In time, the church came to recognise that all Christians might take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel, and so grow in faith and devotion to our Lord. [Ash Wednesday Liturgy].*

On Sundays in Lent much of the festive nature of the liturgy is missing. The entrance of the ministers may be during the litany, rather than singing a hymn. Music is restrained. The decoration and use of colour in the building is reduced and restrained. The word "Alleluia" is missing from the liturgy.

In Year A of the lectionary, the year that we are in, there are also three special Gospel readings, viz: The Samaritan Woman at the well [John 4:5-42, week 3] the Man born blind [John 9: 1-41, Week 4] and the raising of Lazarus [John 11: 1-45, week 5]. In each of these passages the gradual process of enlightenment which characterises the spiritual journey of all believers is revealed.

Why?

Lent is a preparation for Easter. It is a period of Prayer, Fasting and Sharing.

We take Jesus' example. He went by Himself into the quiet of the desert for a substantial time, getting away from daily life. He did not eat, so that he could pray without any interruptions. So, to properly prepare for Easter, we should take Jesus' example and make Lent a time of growing in love and friendship with God, then we should spend some time each day praying to Our Father in Heaven. Lent is a time for personal prayer.

Secondly, Jesus fasted, so should we. This doesn't mean we should walk around with long faces going without things like chocolate or salt. But we can be positive and do something. This should not be like a burden. Jesus said a follower should daily "take up his cross" [Matthew 16:24-26]. This obviously does not literally mean to be crucified, but to work out our need for reconciliation with the Father to return to our right relationship with Him and getting our priorities of time and money right. Perhaps that may mean Reading the Bible, or attending a Lenten Study Group, or giving money to a special goal, in Lent. These are all aspects of Fasting.

Thirdly, Lent is a time for Sharing. We share with those in need. And, not just money! We all have so much more to share: our time; a smile; a kind word; love; food; clothing. We know that what we share with others, we also share with Jesus, Himself. We read in Scripture: "Just as you did it to the least of my brothers, you did it to me." [Matthew 25:40].

Lent calls us to care for ourselves and to care for what is beyond ourselves.

Do you remember the Albanian Nun Mother Teresa who worked with the poor in Calcutta?

She once said: Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. Find the sick, the suffering, and the lonely right there where you are- in your own homes and in your families, in your workplaces and in your schools. You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have the eyes to see. Everywhere, wherever you go, you find people who are unwanted, unloved, uncared for, just rejected by society- completely forgotten, completely left alone.

How can we do this? How can we share something of ourselves with someone who needs it? Maybe make a visit to someone? Inviting someone to coffee? Making THAT phone call? Giving to the local Op Shop?

Here we are at the start of Lent. Depending on how much preparation we do will depend on how much we enjoy the great celebration of Easter.

Lent is not a gloomy time, a sad time or depressing time for those who are remembering what God has done for them. Our self-examination prepares us to recognise our need for God. Then we gather Sunday by Sunday in the liturgy, where our story as the people of God reminds us that God has met and still meets our needs.

Our fasting and self-denial give us the resources with which we can join Christ in his struggle against evil and death. Joining Him in that struggle, we also join Him in His victory.

Don't just let Lent or Easter or Ascension or Pentecost or St James Day or Advent just slip by. These are some of our Epic Reminders. Let this Lent be for you a time of real preparation: A time of prayer, fasting and sharing and make this Lent for you, as the ad says, "Good/Different".