

## A Letter from the Rector

January 30, 2018

My first memory of Lent was approaching a classmate at school, giving her a big smile and a waving, and her curt reply being “my mom and dad said you’re not supposed to be happy during Lent.” I was somewhat taken aback, even more so when I took out my pudding cup at lunch and she told me “you’re not supposed to eat dessert during Lent.” I thought to myself “well Lent sure stinks.”

I came to discover that, for many people, the belief is that the whole purpose of Lent is to be sad, avoid joyfulness at all costs, and to generally punish yourself because that’s what God wants you to do during Lent. There was always some vague attachment to Christ died on the cross for you, so during Lent you should be sad about it, or Jesus suffered in the wilderness for 40 days, so you should suffer for 40 days too to see what it feels like. Too often they get all the way through the 40 days and nothing has changed in their life other than some resentment over lost pudding.

I want to propose a different way of looking at Lent. It is--instead of a “season for sadness”--a season for reflection. It is a time to take an honest and sometimes hard look at the things that are keeping you separated from God in your life. If the Great Commandment is to love God and love your neighbor, then what would it be like if we all spent the 40 days of Lent reflecting on the things in our life that get in the way? I promise you that it is not smiling and waving at a friend. It probably isn’t pudding cups either (though self-indulgence can certainly be something that gets in the way). During Lent I will take the time to ponder the ways in which I put my own self-interests ahead of loving God and my neighbor, the times I let fear or timidity or fatigue or anything else get in the way--not to make myself sad but instead to help me be aware so that I can do something about it.

In the Gospel, Christ was baptized and then immediately went out into the wilderness to pray. When he came out he was ready to get to work at the ministry of his life, God’s mission of love in the world. This Lent you will all get to make choices about how you participate, if there are indulgences you will give up, and if there are disciplines you will take on (I highly recommend the St. Stephen’s Lenten devotionals created by our very own parishioners!). It is my prayer and hope that, whatever you choose to do during this Lent, it will help you to remember your own baptismal vows, call you out into your own wilderness to pray, and lead you back ready to get to work at the ministry of your life.



Steven

P.S. Please know that I am always ready to talk with you if you would like guidance, suggestions for Lent, or even just some good old prayer. Blessings! -S.B.