

Ash Wednesday
St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH
The Rev. Dr. Janet Lombardo
March 5, 2025

Lent – A Time for Reflection

Today is the start of Lent. Traditionally, Lent has been about giving something up – usually chocolate, at least if you are a Chocolate lover. When I was growing up, we didn't eat meat on Fridays during Lent. That was a holdover from the Roman Catholics, who did not eat meat on Fridays in general. That tradition was first instituted by the Pope, when the fishing industry was on the verge of collapse.

There are many church rules that were enacted in response to an issue prevalent at the time. As the saying goes – look where the money is – that is often the root of a church rule. This is completely opposite from Jesus' life and teachings. No matter how beneficial they may be, institutions have their flaws. Not everything is inherently good or bad, it often depends on the issues being addressed. In this instance, the fishing industry in Italy was saved, as people started eating more fish. At least that is how the story goes.

Now there are many church practices that focus on deepening your faith and your connection to God. Fasting is one of them. Traditionally, fasting was also done during Lent, especially on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. I think that this is how we developed the notion of giving something up for Lent. So I have been thinking, what would be a beneficial practice for our day and age to remind us of our Spiritual connection to each other and to God? What practice would help you to be more open to others and the work of the Spirit in their midst? For me, time for prayer and silence comes immediately to mind. We set aside so little time for prayer and Spiritual development, and we have so little silence in our world. For reading and study, for listening and prayer. How would your life be different if you started or ended every day with 10 minutes of prayer and listening for God's still small voice? Many of you may already be doing this. I can't stress enough how life changing it can be.

Other options might be to listen to someone who thinks differently than you, watching news that you typically don't watch, or maybe not watching any news at all. Perhaps taking a break from TV or social media, or whatever you may need a break from. Lent is a season to set aside. Six weeks to reflect, to refocus, to see where you want more, and where you want less. It is a time of self-examination, a time to renew and reenergize your life priorities. It is a time for confession and absolution. It is a time to let go of past sinfulness and live into God's grace and love for you.

In many ways Lent is a pause button. Are things how you want them to be? Is your Spiritual house in order? Are there ways you would like to be more attentive to your Spiritual life? To your family life? Do you remember every day that God loves you, and that God's grace is freely given? Do you remember that we are people of abundance? That we don't need to be in competition for resources, because there is enough for all? Do you live your life with a sense of generosity and kindness? Are you grateful? Any of these practices would serve you well for Lent, and I am sure there are things I didn't think of.

I would like to close with a quote from Joan Chittister that helps me to see Lent in a new way:

"Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been, and are not. Lent is the grace to grieve for what we should have done, and did not. Lent is the opportunity to change what we ought to change, but have not. Lent is not about penance. Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now. *Lent is a summons to live life anew.*"

May you have a holy and grace-filled Lent.

Amen