

Kates 1st sermon in Lent, 2-21-2021 During this Lent we are exploring ways to grow the heart of Jesus within ourselves. So join us for this journey to a meaningful and holy life. The readings for the day were Genesis 9:8-17 and Mark 1:9-15.

Blessings, Kate

We begin another Lent this week. Honestly I have never needed it more! This past year has been rough on my spiritual life. Perhaps it's the same for many of you. I need not rehearse all the reasons that I feel unmoored from my anchor in the sacred, but with Covid19 and the distance it has placed between all of us in the congregation, last year's election and the constant clang of anger in the air, and the insurrection on the Capitol building which brought the recent trial and more divisiveness to endure, I have been living in a constant reactive state, rather than a God-centered one.

My long-held morning spiritual practice of rising before dawn to be in the silent dark has been disturbed by a nagging desire to know what happened overnight too many times. A switched on computer in that precious time distances me from the God I seek and my inner self immediately! As the glare hits my face, I already know I have lost the day to less meaningful concerns. When screaming headlines come before whispers from the heart, I know I'm in trouble.



And so, I need Lent. I believe we all do. Our whole agitated country does. I am afraid we have forgotten who we are and what we're about. In the ancient church, this season of Lent had a very specific purpose. It was an intensive preparation for Baptism, the sacrament that asks us direct questions about what is important in life. It was the season to learn what being a disciple of Jesus Christ actually meant, to put on the mind of Christ, or as I like to say to grow the heart of Christ. The heart in Jesus' time was understood as the core of the person, the place where thoughts and feelings came together, where spirit and body converge and incarnation is sparked.

Therefore, Lent asks all Christians to delve into our hearts, our core, to discover what we need, what we may be lacking, to continue our growth into the heart of Christ. To ask if we've allowed attitudes and distractions to take us off course. For example, should the glare of the computer come before prayer? Or does our anger bring us into a

politics of disdain, adding bitterness to the mix in our core. To disciple Jesus, we are called to be holy as he is holy. To be whole in heart as he is. Bitterness and holiness do not mix.

Now don't get me wrong, anger can certainly be a holy emotion, often a signaling that something is wrong, unfair, and unjust in our world. Bitterness is different. It is a stuck anger with nothing to be done about it. It seethes. **Bitterness seethes. But holy anger acts.** It creates. It can even reconcile. But we'll come back to this later in the season...

Our forty days of Lent mirrors the forty days Jesus spent in the desert wilderness immediately following his baptism, that moment he experienced the affirmation from God that he was a "beloved son." His desert sojourn was about what it meant to be the Christ, to be the beloved, to be faithful to his call as he faced temptations of Satan. Mark doesn't give us many details about the nature of those temptations as do Matthew and Luke. From them we can surmise they were about what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. Would he do fantastic acts to prove his great power, such as turning stones to bread or casting himself off a tall parapet? Would he be out for himself and rule the world, simply by giving his allegiance to Satan? Or would he be faithful to who he was in relation to God, his Abba? Ultimately, he would choose **humility** over status and power. Simply, "God first."

I do think that this is where we must begin as well, recognizing **humility as characteristic of the heart of Jesus.** Theologian and spiritual teacher Beverly Lanzetta writes: "The word 'humility' comes from the Latin word *humus* (earth), specifically *humilitas*, a noun related to the adjective *humilis*, which may be translated as 'humble', but also as 'grounded,' 'from the earth,' or 'love.' To be of the earth is to know that one day we return to the dust of our ancestors. It is a realization that we exist in an interdependent circle of relations. We need each other."¹ The words of Ash Wednesday are words that call us to humility,

¹ Beverly Lanzetta, *A New Silence: Spiritual Practices and Formation for the Monk Within*, p. 15.

to remember that we are of earth, and interdependent with all earthlings. The reading from Genesis today asks that we see the same thing. The story of Noah tells us that not only are we in covenant with God, but that the covenant does not make us special or raise us up, as it is shared with “every living creature of all flesh.” This includes every human being, as well as all the creatures that breathe on the earth. When we are grounded in humility, we can see our sister and brother humans and all animals, insects, even trees, as having their own dignity in covenant with God.

This season begins by asking us to honor covenantal life by living with humility, with a keen awareness of who we are in relation to all being and who we are not. It asks us to take on our true identity and give up pride of place. To let go of any air of superiority when dealing with those who are not of “our kind,” either by virtue of their politics,

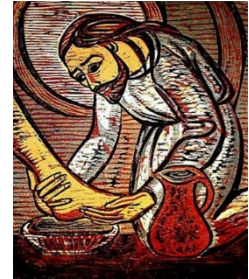
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ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, economic status, or even their given species. The creator has

covenanted with all. The rainbow is for all of us.

As we work to develop a healthy humility, we become grounded in a truth often ignored. Humility is not a popular virtue today, but it certainly would go a long way to healing what ails us, the mindset that has torn us into pieces. Yes, our divides are real, but so is the deeper reality that, underneath it all, we are interwoven in common covenant and dependence upon God. Even Jesus (who if anyone could claim pride of place, he could) refuses to choose power, reputation, and status over a humble relationship with the One who calls him beloved. God is always first.



So, beloveds, let us cultivate together a heart of humility, grounded in the love of God, aware of our dependence upon all other living things. We must let go of any pretension that we may find this deeper sense of connection to and responsibility toward all created being. If we are to grow within ourselves the heart of Jesus, we must remember that **he** tended to give pride of place to the poor, the outcast, the suffering. In our Lenten practice, let us find a way this week to do the same. Amen.