



Lent is Here

What do we say about Lent? Now a days I don't think many people are conscious of Lent, or if they are, they don't know what it is or what it's for. Here is a quick primer, and also a sales pitch to engage with us this Lent at Kallam Grove:

There are three great holidays in the Church's year. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus the king. At Easter we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead and God's defeat of sin, death, and the Devil. At Pentecost we celebrate God's giving of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. All of these events are MAJOR things to be excited about. The Church calls them not just holidays (Literally "holy days", or "days set apart"), but also "feast days". I believe the biggest and best parties on the planet should be thrown by Christians on these three very special days.

As with any big day, though, there is a lot of expectation. It is hard for one day to hold so much (so Christmas is twelve days and Eastertide is 50 days!) and to fully be ready for it the Church in its wisdom saw there was a need to prepare for them. Advent is the time we prepare for Jesus' arrival. And Lent is the time we prepare for Easter. All the traditions we have around Lent are designed to help us be ready for the party on the very special day of Easter.

So, what are the traditions we have for Lent? Well, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. Most of us

know about this custom. In recent years I think it has become an act of defiance for evangelicals in this country. We feel the press of an increasingly secularized, which is another word for godless, society. We feel the criticism and often open contempt of the media. Walking around with crosses on our foreheads is a way to make a statement against it all. I'm not necessarily against having a way to identify ourselves in the face of this world. I want God's name on my forehead, not the beast's number. But I don't think this is why we have Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday is not basically about showing *other people* what we believe. It is an attempt to help us come to grips with *ourselves*. Typically as the ashes are put on our foreheads the pastor will say something to the effect of, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return". Seems a little macabre... But the point of Lent is to prepare ourselves for the full gift of Easter resurrection, and that means first coming to grips with who and what we really are. We are mortal – prone to sickness and death. We need help desperately.

And it's not just our bodies that break, we are also broken in spirit. When people are sad in the Bible, one of the things they always do is take off their nice clothes and put on poor ones and then cover themselves in ashes. To receive the ashes on our foreheads is to admit to God, "Something is wrong and it is out of my control. I repent of whatever I've done and wait for your help".

Finally, when we wear the outward signs of our self-realizations, we see we are not alone. God never calls us to walk in our brokenness alone. God gives us each other in the church. We all need grace, and we have all been given grace. Ash Wednesday is a day for making statements, but it isn't for the unbelieving world around us. The statements are for us – renewed confession of our need for God's help, renewed confession of our powerlessness, renewed determination to walk alongside each other through the process.

So Ash Wednesday is a day for reflection and introspection. What a fitting way to set off a season of reflection and introspection! The point of Lent is not different from Ash Wednesday. Over forty Days we learn to confront our brokenness, to realize again our deep need for a savior, and to appreciate the deep love of Jesus displayed by his willing death on the cross. We also learn to see the true value we have in God's eyes, that Jesus would die for us! And we learn to rest in the hope of eventual justice and righteousness and resurrection. The point is the same, but the means are different.

The traditional practice of Lent is to fast. We all know, fasting is simply abstaining from something. It can be a fast from food, or certain kinds of food. It can be a break from TV or media. It can be a break from certain activities. There are all kinds of things we can give up temporarily as fasting. But why fast in the first place? Does God want us to stop enjoying life? Or is it somehow offensive to God to enjoy life when we are thinking about Jesus' death?

Fasting is great, but it is pointless if we don't understand why we do it. Fasting is not about depriving ourselves of enjoyment. I don't believe God wants you to be overly serious or sad. The New Testament says we should have joy. The reason we temporarily deprive ourselves of things is to maintain focus. It should be the equivalent of tying a piece of string around your finger to help you remember something. Fasting is hard because it breaks habits. It's the time of the day when we need a pick-me-up; we get up and reach for whatever that thing is and then realize – "Oh, I am fasting from this right now". After some French we may find ourselves asking, "*Why did I choose to do this stupid fast anyway!!!*" and it is in that moment that the introspection of Lent can come rushing in to break the

numbness of our routines. It IS NOT, “Jesus died for me so I have to be unhappy”. It is instead, “I don’t need chocolate, etc. – I just remembered, I need Jesus!”

Temporarily depriving ourselves of creature comforts is one way to make space to remember our desire for Jesus. But it is not be the only way to do this. Fasting most often means putting something aside, but it can also mean picking something else up. At seminary, under the guidance of Spiritual Directors, I found a whole new side to fasting in the temporary practice of spiritual disciplines. Prayer journaling, daily Bible reading, even physical exercise, are also ways to make space for reflection in Lent. When we realize that deprivation is only a tool to make space then we see there are other ways to do the same thing.

So as Lent approaches (Ash Wednesday is March 6th this year) I urge you to consider what you need to do to create space for reflection this season. How can you make room to ask, “How am I broken, and where do I need healing?” “Where have I already died and need resurrection?” “What deeper faithfulness is Jesus calling me to right now?”

Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas are funny celebrations when we take time to think about them. I tend to be offended when secular society tries to bend the focus away from God’s actions for humans, but really it’s a minor miracle that our broader culture celebrates them at all. The gifts of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are very specific and I think they are easier to miss than any of us would like to admit. Paul said the gospel of Christ crucified is foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews. He was right. It is. Just listen to the cynicism and sarcasm in media as any of our special days come up. And yet, as Paul goes on to say, for us who are being saved, it is the power and wisdom of God.

Next month I will write about Easter, but it is always my hope and prayer that you will know the true power and wisdom and love and joy of God when Easter comes. It isn’t a day for bunnies or flowers or renewal of plant life. Easter is the beginning of the end of all things. It is the surest sign we have until Jesus returns that what the prophets of old promised is true. That a day is coming when God will wipe the tears from the eyes of his people and start creation anew. Easter is deep, but it’s easy to miss. Staying healthy, paying bills, acquiring stuff is all so much more immediate. It seems so important and so final. Unless we fight to create room for deeper questions we will never ask them. And if we don’t know what to look for we will miss Easter and all of its gifts. Don’t miss Easter!

Lenten Bible Study

If you find yourself asking questions like this:

“I wonder what I should give up for Lent?”

“Do I even have time to think about Lent this year?”

“Isn’t this all over kill? Why should I care about Lent anyway?”

Then let me invite you to our Lenten Bible Study. We will meet Thursday evenings at 7pm downstairs in the young adult classroom from March 7th to April 14th. We are using Max Lucado’s curriculum, *He chose the Nails*, to guide and focus our discussion. One of the things I like about this curriculum is that it focuses on Holy Week and Easter as gifts from God. Far from trying to make us feel bad,

brother Lucado tries to help us understand how deeply we are loved! Even if you are unable to attend our Thursday night discussions you can still follow along with the study guide. Lent is an incredibly important time of the year for all Christians – even more than Advent it is the time we allow ourselves to be serious and focused about our faith. What are we doing and why? What is God doing? Life takes away our attention to answer these kinds of questions and they are much less pleasant to ask alone. Come and join us for our bible study; let us make room for you to ask these questions and see what answers we find together.

WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS MONTH?

QUARTERLY CONFERENCE

MARCH 10TH, 2019 Folks, this is a big one. This meeting does have several important things on the agenda, but the most pressing for now is the creation of a new Safety Committee. Its duties will be to create and implement safety procedures and emergency action plans for the church. To create this committee will mean officially changing our Constitution and Bylaws, which requires a majority vote from at least 2/3 of the congregation. Megan has already sent out absentee ballots. IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND THE MEETING ON MARCH 10TH THEN PLEASE FILL OUT AN ABSENTEE BALLOT AND GIVE IT TO MEGAN BEFORE THE MEETING.

Bible Study

This has already been mentioned, so there's no need to go into more detail, but please do consider engaging with us this year. Even if you are unable to join us every week you can still take a book and follow along. Thursday evenings at 7 PM, March 7th - April 14th

March Youth Event

Skyzone Trampoline Park – Sunday, March 24th We will have lunch at the church before leaving. Please let anyone on the youth committee know if you (or your kids) are interested.

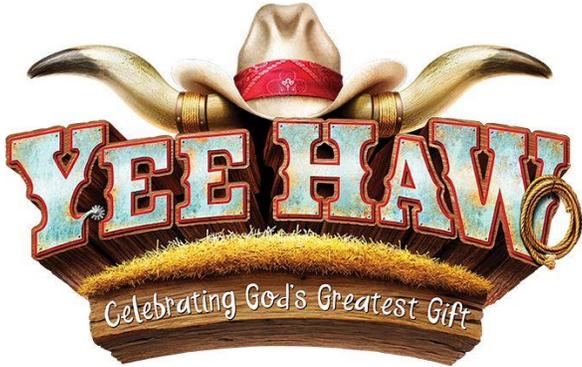
Coffee and Doughnuts

Sunday, March 17th, 9 AM We've taken a break from our Sunday morning fellowship times, but we are getting back on track. If you don't want to have a sugar comma, fear not; we will have fruit and savory food as well.

Grovers Diners

Like the Coffee and Doughnut Fellowship, we have taken a break from Grovers Diners, but we would love to resume. There is a new sign up sheet for 2019 in the entryway. Please pick a month and let's get back to eating!

LOOKING WAY AHEAD



2019 VBS

Saturday, June 22 - 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

and

Sunday morning presentation, June 23

This year's curriculum is the western inspired, Yee Haw. Go ahead and put this on your calendars!

Our next Festival of Tables will be September the 21st.

"My Vision of Heaven" is the theme and hostesses can have a lot of fun with their "vision", be it doughnuts or chocolates or of a personal nature or spiritual nature you can never go wrong.

A sign up sheet for those wishing to hostess a table will be posted in the vestibule the last Sunday of March.

