

Ponderings

March 1, 2015

“Giving Up Lent for Lent”

One of my favorite authors is Diana Butler Bass. In 2007, she wrote a poignant reflection on the power and weakness of the season of Lent. I find her thoughts and reflections particularly meaningful as I struggle to find my own deeper meaning during these 40 days before Easter. As Diana shares her thoughts, I confess that I too find it difficult to follow all the disciplines seemingly inherent in this tradition. Here is her reflection on Lent from the *God's Politics* blog:

“When I gave up Lent for Lent, it became clear that I needed to give up the idea that certain religious disciplines would bring me closer to God. This belief had plagued me since I was an evangelical teenager struggling with my congregation’s expectation for a “daily quiet time.” Never able to maintain this program of spiritual rigor, I felt like a Christian failure. When I finally admitted that I could not do it, I experienced a new freedom in prayer. Giving up led me to a richer and deeper connection of God in prayer, and led me to practice prayer in ways that resonate with who God has made me to be – unique, meaningful, and transformative. Not a program, but a way of being.

Lent tempts Christians to try to fulfill other people’s expectations of what spirituality should look like, usually related to some sort of religious achievement or self-mortification. But Lent is neither success nor punishment. Ultimately, Lent urges us to let go of self-deception and pleasing others. These 40 days ask only one thing of us: to find our truest selves on a journey toward God.

Giving up Lent for Lent meant giving up guilt. Although I have been back to church for Ash Wednesday many times since I gave up Lent for Lent, that year freed me from spiritual tyranny and helped me understand Easter anew. The journey to Easter is not a mournful denial of our humanity. Rather, Lent embraces our humanity – our deepest fears, our doubts, our mistakes and sins, our grief, and our pain. Lent is also about joy, self-discovery, connecting with others, and doing justice. Lent is not morbid church services. It is about being fully human and knowing God’s presence in the crosshairs of blessing and bane. And it is about waiting, waiting in those crosshairs, for resurrection.”

As we reflect on the meaning of Lent for ourselves, who we are as a part of Pilgrim Church, and how can we make a meaningful contribution to those around us; we remember that we are part of a continuous line of Christians who have celebrated for 2000 years the One who was born in poverty, lived a resolute and just life, died on a cross, and rose from the dead.

It is not so much on what we are giving up, even if it is Lent, but that what we can free ourselves from “our deepest fears, our doubts, our mistakes and sins, our grief, and our pain.” Let go and let Lent be “about joy, self-discovery, connecting with others, and doing justice.”

Blessings,

Bryce Current