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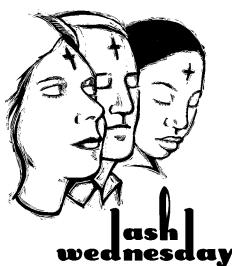
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PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

"O my poor people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes ..." – Jeremiah 6:26

Growing up in a predominantly Roman Catholic neighborhood, there were times when our “Lutheranness” would stand out. While we attended Sunday School, my Catholic friends would be bussed to St. Joseph’s after school for Catechism classes during the week. While my Catholic classmates would bring peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to school on Fridays in observance of the “meatless Friday” custom of the time, I would have a ham and cheese or bologna sandwich in my lunchbox. And on one particular Wednesday, the Catholic students and teachers would arrive at Stony Brook School with ashes on their foreheads, while the Lutheran and other Protestant students would have faces as clean as any other day of the year.



While we observed Ash Wednesday in my home congregation, imposition of ashes was not practiced at St. Peter’s. It was considered “too Catholic” at the time, and we would often be reminded of Jesus’ teaching that *“when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret”* (Matthew 6:17-18). But as I grew older, many things began to change in both churches. Catholic students began to bring ham sandwiches to school on Fridays, and Lutherans began to practice imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday. As we prepare to begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday here at Zion, we will once again be invited to come forward and have ashes placed on our foreheads as we begin this holy season of reflection, repentance, and renewal.

Ashes are a very rich symbol rooted in ancient customs and practices. Many indigenous people in North America have blackened their faces with ashes when fasting. In Jewish tradition, ashes suggest judgment and God’s condemnation of sin, a reminder following the Fall that *“you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”* (Genesis 3:19). Ashes remind us of our fragility and the impermanence of human existence: *“All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:20). Jesus draws on this tradition in his warning to unrepentant cities, noting that *“if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.”* (Luke 10:13). In the service of Christian burial, we commit the remains of the faithful departed to their final resting place, *“earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”*

But there is another use of ashes that is often overlooked: in the absence of soap, ashes have been used as a cleansing agent, and their use on Ash Wednesday calls to mind cleansing and renewal. Ashes have sometimes been understood as a penitential substitute for water as a sign of Baptism. As *“water both stifles and refreshes, drowns and makes alive, so the ashes also tell of both death and renewal.”* (Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy*). They are a sign of the washing and renewal that are the call of Lent, in which we call upon God to *“create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”* (Psalm 51:10). As ashes are a reminder of our mortality and our need for forgiveness, they also remind us that through Christ’s death and resurrection we are cleansed from our sinfulness and born anew to love and serve God and all God’s people.

Whether we view them as a reminder of our mortality and sinfulness, or as a symbol of cleansing and renewal, it is important for us to remember that the ashes we use at the beginning of Lent come from the palms with which we welcomed our Lord Jesus Christ on Palm Sunday as *hosanna*, the one who comes to “save us.” As we welcomed our Lord on that triumphant day, so do we welcome Christ into our lives at the beginning of the season of Lent, knowing that he is the one who makes all things new, the one who cleanses us from our sins, the one who died and rose again so that we might die to sin and rise to newness of life. When we bear these ashes upon our foreheads, we are once again marked with the Cross of Christ which is our salvation, the means through which Christ transformed death into life and fear into eternal hope.

- “We are not yet, but we shall be. It has not yet happened, but it is the way. Not everything shines and sparkles as yet, but everything is getting better.” – Martin Luther.

Whether or not a person decides to have ashes imposed on their foreheads (and it is always a personal decision), the call of Ash Wednesday remains the same: to return to the Lord who is the source of healing and forgiveness, to be cleansed and borne anew through the living Word of God, and to truly believe that in the Cross of Christ we have the promised gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Yes, it is true that *“you are dust, and to dust you shall return,”* but it is equally true that *“we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”* (1 John 3:2). May this day of ashes be the beginning of our renewal as God’s children who have been gathered together

as his holy church!

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen



VICAR'S DEVOTIONAL

Call to Spiritual Renewal – Part 2

Continuing our study of *Spiritual Renewal*, this is the second part of the two-part series. Last month we reflected on the themes **Pray, Read, and Worship**, while this month we will look at the final four themes: **Study, Serve, Give, and Tell**.

Once again I would encourage you to have a look at the full discussion on the ELCIC website (<http://elcic.ca/CSR/default.cfm>). It is titled, *Call to Spiritual Renewal – ideas for individuals*. The document encourages readers to join others in “striving for deeper discipleship as we live out our baptismal covenants.” Aspects addressed are:

- ✓ regular attendance at worship;
- ✓ daily prayer and scripture reading;
- ✓ yearly involvement in a program of study;
- ✓ regular service in the community (not just the congregation);
- ✓ regular and proportional giving; and
- ✓ commitment to sharing the good news with those around us, beginning with our family and friends.

Here we are then with the final four themes:

Study – *We are called to continue to grow in faith and understanding. As we grow in life, we encounter new challenges and new questions. A deeper faith understanding can assist us in this growth. Scripture is one place to start our study discipline but it doesn't matter what you study or how you study as much as why you study. We hope the following ideas will help you to deepen your understanding of your faith and strengthen your relationship with God.*

- Participate in a regular Bible study.
- Engage the stories, culture & community—and many blogs—at *Living Lutheran*. (livinglutheran.com)
- Search for courses on the *Faith and Wisdom* website. (faithandwisdom.org)
- Use a DVD based course from *The Teaching Company* to study scripture, history, archaeology, philosophy, religion as it relates to faith.
- Read *The Small Catechism* by Martin Luther, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1160–1167.

- Search for relevant TED talks to add to your study discipline. (ted.com/talks)

Serve – *We are called to follow Jesus's example of serving those in need. God so loves the world that we are invited and entrusted to participate in God's mission to love and save the world. Here are some ideas to help you in your service to the community.*

- Create or join a local church outreach program such as a food bank or meal program.
- Participate in a locally-grown food-box program.
- Consider what gifts you have to share with others. Can you offer to share your talents as a way that serves God and others?
- Volunteer with an outside organization such as a local women's shelter, a local hospital, a literacy program.
- Look for an unmet need in your community and gather people to meet it!

Give – *We are called to be generous and joyful in our support of the work of the wider church through our congregations as well as in support of a variety of different church and other charitable agencies. Our consumer culture teaches us to look after our own needs first, and we are called to respond to God's generosity and love with our “first fruits.” Here are some ways to deepen your discipleship in the area of giving.*

- Give an offering each time you attend worship. Calculate what percentage that is of your income.
- Join your congregation's *Pre-Authorized Remittance* program so your offerings go to church even if you can't.
- Talk with your children about stewardship. Ask them to participate in your family's weekly offering, perhaps with a portion of their allowance.
- Offer one or two hours per week of your day job pro bono (for free) in community service.
- Say “yes” to every request to donate, even if it can only be a small amount.

Tell – *We are called to share our faith with those around us, starting with our family and friends. We have developed a bad habit on relying on the “paid professionals” to do this work for us! Here are some ideas to help you get back on track with sharing your faith.*

- Think of one person among your family, friends, neighbours to whom you will say something about what your faith has meant to your life.
- Talk with your parents and grandparents about why faith and their relationship with God is important to them.
- Tell or read Bible stories to your children at bedtime.
- Invite someone to Back to Church Sunday.
- Call a person that you haven't seen in church for a while to see how they are doing.

Submitted by Vicar Albert Romkema

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT

The Finance Committee is most grateful to all those members who make every effort to give consistently whether electronically or through our weekly offering plate.

This month we would like to highlight the families who are giving their offering electronically. You may not see these fellow parishioners place an envelope on the offering plate every week, but their consistent giving does not go unnoticed in our church office. Each month our parish receives a steady and predictable stream of income from these members who have made the commitment to give to God first by having a designated contribution automatically transferred to our parish through our online Preauthorized Offering Program. We greatly appreciate all those members who choose to give in this manner as it helps us maintain a consistent cash flow and pay all of our bills in a timely manner. Please consider joining the growing number of members on this program. If you would like to learn more about this easy, safe and secure way of giving, please get in touch with Terry in the church office any weekday morning or by calling 519-271-8527.

In addition to wanting to share with you the importance of the Preauthorized Offering Program to our church, we also felt it was important to share the following information with our members, which relates to the Preauthorized Offering Program.

After the presentation of the Current Fund Operating Budget for 2017 at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 12th, in which discussion eventually took place about increased offering being needed to cover operating expenses, such as salaries, hydro, heating, insurance, etc., a member, already enrolled in the Preauthorized Offering Program, came forward the following week and increased their offering. Considering our need, we thank the member for responding so quickly. Your continuing faithfulness to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ here at Zion Lutheran Church is greatly appreciated.

FRIENDSHIP MEAL



Our Friendship Meal continues to serve people in need in our community. We are now serving around 100 people a month which unfortunately indicates that things are difficult for some people. Our next Friendship Meal will be Friday, March 31 at 5 PM. Volunteers are needed to prepare, cook, serve, and clean-up. That could mean you and you are welcome to help out. Indeed, we need you! Questions? Please call Sister Jean Widmeyer (519-273-6810).

EASTER FLOWERS



As is our custom, at Zion, donations will be accepted so the Women of Faith group can purchase flowers and decorate the church for our Easter celebrations. Please write "Easter Flowers" and your name on a separate envelope and place it on the offering plate or bring it to the church office any weekday morning. Donations will be accepted up to Palm Sunday, April 9. Thank you kindly!

MARCH VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers assist with our Sunday morning worship services. Listed below are those who serve in March as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
Mar 1	Vicar Albert	Mervyn & Joyce Dietz	Vicar Albert		N/A
Mar 5	Linda Springer & Sister Jean Widmeyer	Steve & Marg Lamont	Ed Illman	Tom Cosstick	Lynnette McLeod
Mar 12	N/A	Rudy & Bea Deighton	Teddy Gough	Tom Cosstick	Paul Hansen
Mar 19	Marilyn Sylvester & Linda Weitzel	Wayne & Linda Faulhafer	Dr. Jo Knackstedt	Darrell Renecker	Paul Hansen
Mar 26	N/A	Paul & Norma Hansen	Marilyn Wells	Darrell Renecker	Kevin Tuer