

# PASTOR SCOTT'S

## MONTHLY MESSAGE



## What to Do During Lent

We are on the cusp of Lent. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on March 6th. March 10th is as late as Ash Wednesday can fall, and February 4th is as early as it can be, so in 2019 we are in a "late" Lenten season.

In the Reformed Tradition (which Presbyterians are part of) the meaning of Lent is well captured in a liturgical piece entitled "Invitation to Observe a Lenten Discipline":  
*We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and our need for the love and forgiveness shown to us in Jesus Christ. I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ, to observe a Holy Lent, by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by practicing works of love, and by reading and reflecting on God's Holy Word.*

Fasting is an element of virtually all traditions "Lenten Practices." For some this "fast" is not eating on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday until an evening meal, and for many that meal should contain no meat. In other traditions it is a fast during the whole of Lent. Not a total abstinence of food, but a reduction how much and how often we eat. Some follow a practice of eating only one meal per day, some have one full meal per day "which may be supplemented by two smaller meals, which together should not equal the full meal."

In case you were wondering, *NO*, this fasting practice did not come about as a means of losing those extra pounds we put on during the Advent and Christmas seasons. However, Lent may be a good time to improve one's diet through eating less overall, limiting or cutting-out meat, eliminating snacking, etc.

Others see "Lenten fasting" as an abstinence from luxuries. Chocolate is often a target of such abstinence. Poor chocolate. I don't know if Hershey's stock typically takes a dip during Lent, but it might be worth looking into. However, the emerging health benefits of dark chocolate may incline some to believe we should only steer away from milk chocolate during Lent.

Whatever your fasting practice, just ensure you are undertaking it for a sound theological reason. "Suffering for the sake of suffering" is not a sound theological position. Fasting just to make you grumpy violates any number of Christ's teachings.

Some view the "unencountered meals" not as a missed meal, but rather a meal with Christ. They spend the time that would have been involved in preparing and consuming the missed meal as a time spent with Christ in thought, meditation, and prayer. Others fast as a practice of humility. Feeling proud, comfortable and self-satisfied in life is a sure-fire way to miss the purposes and priorities of God. Some engage in fasting as a means of affirming to God that we want nothing more than the coming of God's kingdom. Other see fasting as a partner in bringing about social justice, as in Isaiah 58:6 where God states "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" Many will take the money they would have spent on the missed meals and give that to an organization they see as empowering justice.

But fasting and abstaining are only part of the Reformed view of Lent. The invitation above is an invitation to do and act. We are to engage in self-examination, and to repent of those spiritual shortcomings we find. We are to engage in prayer. May I suggest more prayer than we usually partake in. Possibly even finding a text on prayer and practicing what it recommends. We are to practice acts of love — with neighbors and enemies. And we are to read —and reflect — upon the Bible, God's Holy Word.

It turns out that Lent is much more about putting things into our life than taking things out. Even to the extent that what is taken out is to encourage, make room for, and enhance the things we start or amplify during Lent.

The evening of March 6th, Ash Wednesday, you can gather at church to engage in this period of enhancement. We will begin with a simple meal around 5:00pm. At 6:00 we will start worship in the sanctuary, and during worship we will accept Christ's invitation to dine with him and reach the imposition of ashes reminding us of our limitations, our finitude. We will spend time in prayer, and in reflection. Come and begin your Lenten practices!

Peace,

*Pastor Scott*