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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
February 17, 2021
Ash Wednesday

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as I said in the announcements, tonight we begin our 40-day journey of Lent.

Tonight we begin that passage of time from Ash Wednesday to the Resurrection of our Lord, that is Easter Sunday.

Tonight we begin traveling that solemn path in this holy and penitent church season.

Tonight we journey and tomorrow we journey some more.

And the day after we journey, and the day after the day after we journey still more.

But where, pray tell, are we going?

And how, pray tell, are we going to get there?

What is Lent's destination and what is our mode of transportation?

PAUSE

Now, we probably know the rule of thumb, which is to ask two people where this bus, or where this train, or where this plane is going.

Before getting on board we are told to always ask at least two fellow passengers about their destination.

And if they don't agree, well then, don't get on that bus, or train, or plane.

No, if our fellow passengers don't agree about their destination, we should be leery about boarding that bus, train, or plane.

So where are we going, sisters and brothers Christ?

How would we answer this question?

Where are we headed in this season of Lent?

What is our destination?

Are we travelling overseas to some exotic location in Europe?

To France, or Germany, or Spain?

Or, are we travelling south to the warmer climate of the Caribbean?

To the Virgin Islands, to the Bahamas, to Jamaica?

Or, are we travelling domestically, to say Yellowstone, or the Grand Canyon, or Niagara Falls?

Or to the Rockies, or San Francisco, or Maine?

Where are we travelling in this season of Lent?

Where are we headed?

Well, sisters and brothers in Christ, we know that it is not to any of those places which I mentioned.

We are not travelling to any location one might learn from AAA or from some other travel agency.

There is no travel brochure to where we are travelling.

Because, we are travelling toward God.

Our destination is the Lord.

We are journeying toward a deeper relationship with our Creator and Redeemer.

This Church, God's people, you and me, we are bound for the divine.

Indeed, there should be a banner on the side of the church building stating, "God or bust."

Indeed, there should be a placard on our church's front lawn stating boldly, "Bound for God."

Indeed, our marquis should read, "Heading for God. Seats for the journey still available."

PAUSE

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, it is not that we are making a physical journey.

It is not that we are travelling so many miles.

It is not that we are going from point A to point B on some map.

No, but we are journeying.

And it is THE most important journey we can make.

We are making a journey which is ongoing.

We are making a journey which happens not just in the season of Lent.

It is our life's journey.

And it is a journey toward life, toward God.

Lent is our life's journey, and it is a journey toward life in Jesus.

So, yes, we are travelling.

We are travelling to God.

And this journey is a process, a process of renewal, it is a process of cleansing, it is a process of restoration.

The prophet Joel calls the people, saying, "Return to the Lord, your God."

"Return to the Lord, your God."

And, the prophet Joel tells the people to sanctify the fast.

Call a solemn assembly.

Sanctify the congregation.

Jesus issues a similar announcement in Matthew.

Jesus calls the people to repentance, to fasting, to prayer, and to almsgiving.

These things, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving...these spiritual disciplines teach us about reconciliation.

These spiritual disciplines teach us about renewal, about cleansing, and about restoration.

These spiritual disciplines are the journey.

They are our mode of transportation.

These spiritual disciplines lead us into a deeper relationship with God.

And what we find when we experience a deeper relationship with God is that we experience a deeper relationship with each other and with creation.

They are really one and the same.

A deeper relationship with God translates into deeper relationships with others and with the world.

And vice versa, deeper relationships with others and with the world translate into a deeper relationship with God.

We might think about it in terms of the cross.

The horizontal relationships we have with others and the world impacts the vertical relationship with God.

Our vertical relationship with God impacts our horizontal relationships with others and the world.

So, yes, Lent is a journey, part of the ongoing journey of the Christian life.

Lent is not a journey such that after Easter we are now somehow done with the journey.

PAUSE

My in-laws, my wife's parents travel each to Florida at this time each year.

They usually go to Florida in January or February, and they are gone for about six weeks.

And even with the pandemic, they are still going this year.

They travel to Florida for six weeks, and then they return shortly before Easter.

And while they travel they may or may not check-in with Kathy.

Usually they depart for Florida and we won't hear anything from them until they get back.

And I know that we have some members that make extended trips like this during winter.

And God bless those who are able to enjoy a trip of several weeks away during the cold weather.

And then when these folks return, they take up their former life at home.

But, we should not think of the journey of Lent in the same way, such that when the journey is over we go back to our regular routine.

We tend to approach Lent though in just that way.

We come up to the season of Lent in the church year, and we do our Lenten disciplines, we do our journey with our Lord toward the cross.

But when the season of Lent is over, we figure that our journey is over.

We figure that we have done our share of fasting, of prayer, of almsgiving.

But, the truth is, Lent is meant to be a time of creating habits to be continued throughout all of life's journey.

So maybe we begin a new prayer regiment, whereby we pray at a certain time each day, or we pray a certain prayer over and over.

We ought to continue that prayer routine even after Lent has concluded.

Or maybe we cultivate in Lent a new way to be generous.

Maybe we are giving of ourselves, our time and energy, or we give from our financial blessings in a way we hadn't before.

And throughout the 40 days we keep up that pattern of generosity.

We should continue our course, we should continue showing generosity as we had during Lent.

Or, maybe we learn the value of fasting during Lent.

Maybe we learn to abstain from some unhealthy habit.

Maybe we give up some indulgence that we know really isn't good for us or good for others around us.

Whatever it is, hopefully, during the forty days of Lent we get quite good at not needing that indulgence anymore.

And, we should continue to abstain from those unhealthy habits even beyond Lent and Easter.

PAUSE

These spiritual disciplines—fasting, prayer, and generosity—are not just for a season.

The Lenten journey in truth does not conclude at Easter.

Our journey toward God is an ongoing journey, and so that mode of transportation is something we need to continue continuing on.

Our relationship with God, and our relationships with others and creation should continue to deepen even after we have concluded the Lenten season.

We continue in the process of renewal and cleansing and restoration.

And if I may, I would remind us again of the sign of the cross.

For it is the cross that we keep ever before us on this journey.

It is the cross that when we gather in church is the symbol that looms large before us.

There is a reason for that.

There is a reason why we see the cross displayed prominently at the front of the church.

The cross is our compass on this journey.

It is the emblem of renewal, of cleansing, and restoration, for it is at the cross where there is the forgiveness of sin.

The cross is the sign of life for our journey of life.

Indeed, the cross reminds us that God in Jesus Christ journeyed to us to give hope to our journey.

The cross reminds us that God has journeyed to this world to bring us salvation.

So, I pray that your journey of Lent is a blessing.

I pray that your journey of Lent leads you into a fuller journey with God throughout all your life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.