

SILVER THREADS

Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 KJV

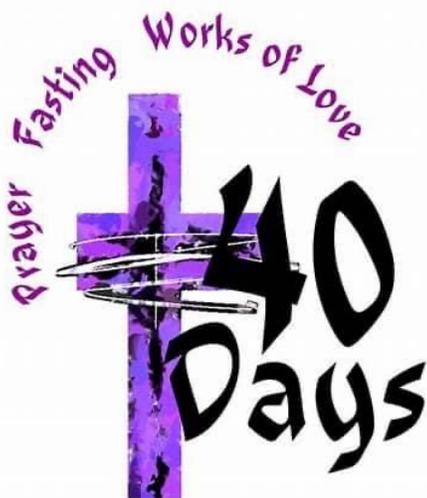
or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.



Well here we are in the season of Lent. It just seems like we were celebrating Christmas, we blinked, and now we are in Lent. Like Advent, Lent is also a journey but unlike Advent, Lent can be a darker and perhaps a harder journey. Advent tends to be one of joyful expectation, a time of happy preparation as we await the birth of our Saviour. We are preparing for something wonderful, something to celebrate. Lent is a journey that leads us to the cross and it is in so many ways a painful journey. I think Lent asks more of us than Advent - Lent asks us to go deeper into our very souls - to take a good long, hard look at our lives and where we fall short of what God requires of us. And what does God require of us:

Micah 6:8

***He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.***



This is such a familiar passage to many of us but how can that help to inspire us on our Lenten journey. Like a lot of you I attended a church service on Ash Wednesday - the traditional “kick off” to Lent. I listened to familiar scripture readings and said the prayers of preparation, asking forgiveness for my sins and shortcomings, and opening my heart to what God may be requiring of me this Lent. I left with the ash cross on my forehead and as I headed home I reflected on what that symbol, that little dirty smudge of ash on my forehead really meant to me. *“Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.”*

As a senior of a “certain age” I am very conscious of the shortening of my earthly days and that there are things in my life that I can no longer take for granted - youth being one! But I am also conscious of how precious the time I have left is and how I don’t want to waste a second. This year I approached Lent as I always do by digging out some spiritual reading that would become a part of my daily devotions, by promising myself I will eat healthier and add daily exercise to my routine, by resolving to be kinder and less judgemental etc. etc. That’s great and good for me...if I can actually do that for the 40 days and beyond I will be able to give myself a well deserved pat on the back. But as I went deeper in my reflections, deeper in my daily prayers I began to focus on that initial smudge on my forehead and it started to take on a different meaning for me. It marked me, marked me as a sinner certainly but it marked me as a child of God much as baptism had marked me and launched me into my Christian journey. The water and oil of baptism spoke of an innocence a beginning with infinite possibilities. The ash speaks of a loss of innocence, of my failings, my losses, my struggle and my shortcomings. But it also speaks of hope, it speaks of forgiveness and of God’s unending grace in my life and in the lives of others.

The old saying, “it’s never too late to change” becomes even more relevant during Lent. For me, and for many seniors, we can think that we are too old to change, too old to start a new journey, too old to change those destructive habits of a lifetime and *start a new journey in a old vehicle!* And we would be so very wrong because it is never too late to make at least one or two changes to improve and enhance our lives.

The Lenten season begins. It is a time to be with you, Lord, in a special way, a time to pray, to fast, and thus to follow you on your way to Jerusalem, to Golgotha, and to the final victory over death.

I am still so divided. I truly want to follow you, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, pleasure, power, and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life.

I know that Lent is going to be a very hard time for me. The choice for your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thoughts that are your thoughts, words that are your words, and actions that are your actions. There are not times or places without choices. And I know how deeply I resist choosing you. Please, Lord, be with me at every moment and in every place. Give me the strength and the courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life that you have prepared for me. Amen.

- Henri Nouwen

A friend asked me the other day “what are you giving up for Lent ?” Well...I had initially promised myself to give up Lays BBQ potato chips and sweets...and I confess that was short lived as a bag of chips mysteriously found their way into my grocery cart three days after Ash Wednesday! But it got me thinking...maybe its not what I will give up this Lent but what I will take on.

My mother was a smoker back in the day when it was fashionable and totally acceptable to smoke *whenever and wherever*. Every Lent she would faithfully give up smoking - for forty days not a puff - then Easter Sunday she would begin again! I could never understand her logic. Yes, she exerted great self discipline and denial but was that only for the 40 days? Could it not extend into a longer period and perhaps even into the rest of her life.

Sometimes I think it takes greater strength, greater self discipline to “add” things - behaviours, changes to, for and in our lives, rather than take things away. Now I am not saying that giving up a harmful practice for Lent and beyond is not a bad thing, quite the contrary, but what about letting Lent change us, challenge us, in how we “*act justly, love mercy and walk humbly*”.

Seniors can often be perceived as crotchety, cantankerous, judgemental, opinionated and downright rude! But those unattractive characteristics live in all ages and are certainly not exclusive to seniors. One of the positives for me in reaching a *senior time* is that it has liberated me from letting other peoples judgements and perceptions of me define who I think I am. It is made me more comfortable in my own skin. However, lately I have experienced a very challenging time in my life that has included the loss of things (and people) I loved and things I believed gave me value and gave my life purpose and meaning. It has been a painful time and yes, even an angry time. I’m telling you this not to make you feel sorry for me or even to hope I will explain and elaborate, but I’m telling you this to explain why, at this stage in my life, I am open to making change this Lent to *adding* rather than taking away. And most importantly I am learning to forgive, learning to accept, and learning to appreciate what is important and what is not important in my life. Some of that requires real

work...it requires a shift in my mental attitude and it most definitely requires prayer and a closer walk with God.

Change requires a willingness to step out of our comfort zone, a willingness to open ourselves and our hearts to hearing what God does indeed require of us. I may ask us to let go of all that holds us back to being a healthier, happier and more productive child of God. Age is never a barrier to change - it is indeed "never too late"! So think of what you can "add" this Lent rather than what you may want to give up. Sometimes the two may go hand in hand and in giving up a behaviour or a practice you may be adding a happier and healthier component to your life. May God walk with you as together we journey through Lent and beyond.

The following is an article written by the Reverend Anne Marie MacNeil, a retired priest in our diocese and one of the Chaplains to Qu'Appelle House. I am grateful for her willingness to share her thoughts with us.

Do not cast me off in my old age,
forsake me not when my strength fails. (Psalm 71:9)

The people of God attend worship in our churches, are involved in the various ministries and volunteer their time, talents and treasures for many, many years. As they become older and are unable to participate in parish worship and activities, they often move into retirement homes. This move means a disconnection between parish and community, especially, if they have no family members living in the community. It is an important for them to maintain a relationship with the family of God through worship services.

I became involved in care home ministry when I was associate priest at St. James Anglican Church, with Rev. Malcolm French. Once a month, we brought the Word of God to residents of William Booth Care Home in North Regina. The level of need was quite evident as staff would bring as many as 30 residents from their rooms to attend our celebration of the Holy Eucharist. William Booth staff and Major Sharon are appreciative of our presence and are involved at many levels in our service, from

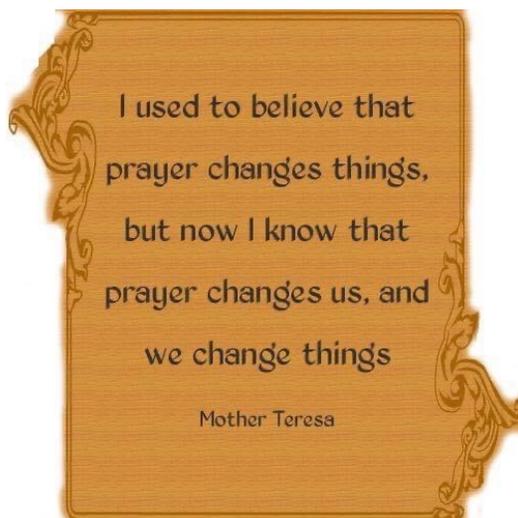
running our PowerPoint worship service and playing the hymns downloaded from the internet, with words on the screen so the residents may sing along. A year ago, I returned to leading worship at William Booth, although due to Covid lockdowns, some months have been cancelled.

When I was at St. Matthew Anglican Church from 2016-2018, I presided at the Eucharist at The Bentley. There were only 3 Anglicans who would attend the service; but I saw how important to bring the church to those three who longed for the connection with God and the Anglican community through the Eucharist. 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (Matthew 18:20).

When I retired in 2018, Bishop Rob appointment me as associate priest at Qu'Appelle House. Currently Rev. Cheryl Johnson, Deacon Rita Brann and I lead the services on a rotation basis. The residents are happy that we attend there and look forward to our Friday service.

When you lead a service in a care home some residents may be suffering from some form of dementia and may not even realize what is happening. However, whenever you lead them in the Our Father, you can see lips moving. They have been praying that prayer since they were little and it is ingrained in their memory. They may not know we are they but we know. They do not want to be cast off in their old age nor forsaken when their strength fails.

Rev. Anne Marie MacNeil



Here is a little smile for you and something to ponder...

When I was in my younger days, I weighed a few pounds less, I needn't hold my tummy in to wear a belted dress.

But now that I am older, I've set my body free; There's the comfort of elastic; Where once my waist would be.

Inventor of those high-heeled shoes my feet have not forgiven. I have to wear a nine now, but I used to wear a seven.

And how about those pantyhose they're sized by weight you see, so how come when I put them on the crotch is at my knee?

I need to wear these glasses as the print is getting smaller; and it wasn't very long ago I know that I was taller.

Though my hair has turned to grey and my skin no longer fits; on the inside its the same old me, its the outside's changed a bit.

Prayer Shawls...

The bishop recently posted a picture of herself wearing a prayer shawl she had been gifted. I loved her comment: "during times I just need to feel the warmth of another's love around my shoulders, I grab my prayer shawl."

These prayer shawls will be available at the synod office to gift to those working in senior ministry and hospital visiting. Please visit the diocesan website under "ministry" for more information.

Prayer shawls are a wonderful way to let our seniors in care homes or in hospital to know that they are being wrapped in God's love and held in prayer.



Again I would like to thank our wonderful volunteers for making worship possible within our care homes in Regina. If you are interested in this ministry please let me know and I will be delighted to have a conversation with you. I ask you to hold the following volunteers and care homes in prayer.

Elmview Extencicare (Third Tuesday of the month)

Rev. Anne Marie MacNeil or Bob Erickson (Team Lead)
Bette-Lou Paragg
Sharon David (pianist)

Parkside Extencicare (Second Thursday of the month)

Rev. Winna Martin (Team Lead)
Diane Gingras (pianist)

Sunset Extencicare (Third Thursday of the month)

Rev. Winna Martin (Team Lead)
Bev Spencer
Diane Gingras (pianist)

Santa Maria Care Home (Fourth Thursday of the month)

Deacon Canon Susan Page (Team Lead)
Pat Kohli
Sharon David (pianist)

***William Booth** is looked after by Rev. Anne Marie MacNeil and **College Park** is primarily looked after by Dean Mike Sinclair. **Qu'Appelle House** has Rev. Anne Marie MacNeil and Cheryl Johnson as priests and Rita Brann as Deacon.

I always welcome contributions to this monthly newsletter. Please contact me if you would like to contribute a reflection, article, joke, poem etc.

The Reverend Winna Martin, Editor
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