

Committing to a Lenten Discipline

Lent is a traditional time to take on some special discipline. In times past, most people committed to “give something up” for Lent, often sweets or chocolate. This is the origin of “Fat Tuesday.” Sweets and fats are cleared out of the house before Lent. Giving up something was urged as a small way of entering more deeply into Jesus’ suffering. Many feel moved to reinterpret Lenten customs; giving up chocolate doesn’t necessarily bring us closer to an understanding of Jesus’ far greater sacrifice.

You may want to make a different kind of commitment or “covenant” this year to spur your spiritual growth. Episcopalians call Fat Tuesday “Shrove Tuesday,” the word “shrove” referring to the act of confessing and seeking forgiveness. The deep, purple colors we use in worship during Lent signal it is a time set aside for looking deeply inward. You can pick a Lenten covenant that helps you look inward, by committing to set aside some unhealthy crutch or taking on a new habit of service or study that enriches. Some create a discipline that accomplishes both, such as giving up alcohol and consciously turning the money saved into added alms (an offering for those in need).

Your choice may be aided if you start by noting what the Bible teaches us about making covenants. Many think God’s first covenant was with the Hebrew people, but God’s first covenant was actually made with all creation after the flood:

“I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”
Genesis 9:11

The Hebrew root in the word covenant means “eating” or “cutting off, separating.” Eating together is the most ancient way of denoting who has been separated apart as friend. God’s first covenant declared that all creation would be God’s kindred forever. The rainbow is described in Genesis as a reminder of this covenant. But rainbows are always remote, and the closer you get, the more allusive they become.

In Jesus, God overcame all allusiveness between Heaven and earth. Jesus is the ultimate expression of God’s covenant with all creation. God chose to step right into the havoc that is the fruit of free will and the pain that ensues from temporal life.

So how is all this relevant to Lent? There is little enjoyment or fulfillment in being part of a family if you never go to any family events or never share joys and sorrows. God’s choice to make all creation as kin is an invitation. It invites us into common life with God and one another, trusting that God’s creative and sustaining love will remain at work in all our affairs. With so many demands on the average person’s time, it is important to consciously commit ourselves to specific ways in which we will live into the enjoyment of God’s covenant. Otherwise, we may miss the best this life can offer; we may miss the nearness of God’s Kingdom. The accompanying list gives you some possible options for Lenten covenants in three important arenas.

CONSIDER MAKING ONE OR MORE COMMITMENTS TO YOURSELF in each of these arenas:
COMMON LIFE AND WORSHIP

- Attend Sunday (or Saturday night) worship every week.
- Participate in one of the formation groups at 10:15 each Sunday:
30/40's; Newcomers; Living the Questions
- Attend one of the weekday Eucharists each week
(Mon & Thurs @ 5:45; Tues @ 12:10; Wed & Fri @ 9 AM)
- Attend Morning Prayer one day each week
(M,W,F at 8:30 AM & T,Th @ 9 AM)
- Attend Stations of the Cross on Fridays at 7:00 PM
- Participate in Centering Prayer on Tuesdays at 6:00 PM (Side Altar Area)
- Pray each day for particular people or needs
- Something Else: _____

SERVICE

- Newly volunteer at one of the following agencies:
 - River City Community Services (Eileen Thomas, 446-2627)
 - Safe Ground (Steve Skiffington; sskiffin011@comcast.net)
 - Francis House (Greg Bunker, 443-2646)
 - Jed Smith School (Nancy Tennyson, 446-2513, ext. 27)
- Sign-Up Now for the next Family Promise Week, beginning March 21st
(The Sign-Up is on the mobile kiosk in the Great Hall.)
- Bring food each Sunday in Lent for the barrels in the Narthex (Entry)
- Educate myself about services available for those without food or housing.
- Join an advocacy group that serves the needs of others (at Trinity: TREE or the Area Congregations Together Local Action Committee.)
- Something Else: _____

PERSONAL DEVOTION

- Use *Forward Day By Day* during Lent
- Use another source of daily reflection during Lent
- Use the brief daily devotions available starting at page 136 of the *Book of Common Prayer* during Lent
- Read through one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John)
- Read the scripture appointed for each day beginning on page 952 of the *Book of Common Prayer* (Daily Office, Year Two)
- Read a book for spiritual insight or growth
- Make a list of the fronts where I need forgiveness
- Make a list of the people I need to forgive
- Something Else _____

Your Signature

Date