



## Repentance and Transparency

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Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Mark 8:31-38

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Here we are a quarter past Lent, as someone quipped online this week – I did the maths we're 10 days into Lent, so it works!! As we turned our attention to the early arriving season of Lent this year, we went through the process of casting our minds over the particularities of the season. The usual questions were asked of what resources we had or perhaps needed. Seeing as Lent (usually) begins with Ash Wednesday the consideration about ashes arose. Traditionally, ashes for Ash Wednesday are generated by burning the Palm Sunday crosses from the previous year. But therein lay a problem, last year we weren't able to celebrate Palm Sunday and hadn't made any crosses for we were in Lockdown level four.

Last year Covid interrupted the cycle of things. It ruptured the rhythm, well, I think of everything but including the interdependent cycle and rhythm of the liturgical year. Fortunately we had ashes to spare but the interrupt required us to look for resource outside, beyond the cycle, the pattern of the usual.

Lent is a season peculiar to the Christian tradition. It's known as a season of penitence, of repentant turning from that which separates us from God. I don't think this is something we're accustomed to, the notion of bended knee, bowed head acknowledgement of our falling short, of the ways we hurt, maim and mar others, our world, and our own made-in-the-image-of-God selves. We're not well rehearsed in making ourselves vulnerable, ceding our power of self-determining, especially to that which is named God who eludes exact definition and too often is and has been misused.

And yet, we do experience the burden of things we've done, or not done, words we've said, or left unsaid, less than desirable outcomes, unintended consequences of our good intentions. As if we've an innate sense of the balance of things, an inner compass that nudges us to reorient when we've drifted too far from our best selves.

Lent continues to be observed, to be perpetuated through time. Is it just a habit or does it serve a need in us? Has human experience over time revealed we need to name our experience of being off kilter? We need a means to interrupt our usual, to seek resource beyond ourselves to rebalance. A season such as Lent provides us a way to set an intention to pay attention, a delimited period of time in which to live more mindfully, to act and do more carefully, to re-member our best selves. If we choose to use the season in this way, as we do, perhaps we'll surprise ourselves, uncover that a slowed down and attentive life is a viable way to live. The press and rush, the hustling life we're accustomed to is a way – faster, maybe, but not necessarily richer. It's funny how the Covid lockdown gifted this knowing to us – even if ultimately it's deemed unsustainable.

As we step our way through this Lenten season, should we have decided to walk, embody a way that articulates a desire to reorient, to relinquish those things that burden and weigh us, to repent, the gospel readings in this time nudge us to check our motivation. For whom are we choosing these things and to what end? Today's gospel throws down a challenge, "For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake ... will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed what can they give in return for their life?" To note, it's considered unlikely these were Jesus words, rather they're words written from the early Christian community in light of the events that subsequently unfolded.

For whom do we, do you, live your life – for ourselves, yourself or for the world? Do we focus on our own needs, on taking the resources we need to fulfil our own ambitions? Or do we moderate our desires aware of the needs of a broader community, of our interconnection with a creation of

finite resource in which our choices impact? Can we hear this as a genuine enquiry without overlay of guilt or fear of judgement?

Penitence, repentance, metanoia are all words that suggest a capacity to discern how we're oriented and that we can choose: to continue as usual or walk other-wise. If we happen to meander the Christian way we can speak of God as one who companions us along the way. To speak this way expresses a sense, perhaps our experience that we journey, we meander with that which other than us, knowable yet eluding our capture. A desire, the choice to walk other-wise opens us up. In this opening up season of penitent metanoia, instead of imagining a God who is doing something to us can we imagine, rather, we're choosing to let something undo in us? Undo that which stops us from opening to life, from trusting we can live transparently with the flow of life in creation.

We're not much accustomed to thinking this way, to the idea of paying attention, taking time to cultivate the soul/spirit/heart to learn how to open ourselves. That we can choose to live in a way to accumulate wealth in the things of God: of life and love revealed in creation. We're not much trained in ways that cultivate the capacity to still and see the magnificent abundance of right now. Not schooled so to acquire the discipline to live in a way that reveals the astonishing beauty of now. We're rather more adept at getting in the way of it, our earnest busy living working to conceal it.

It was with interest I read Rev Dawn Hutchings reflection in a blog this week, "Theologians like Bonaventure and Francis of Assisi insisted that God wrote two books with which to reveal God's-self. The first book is Creation itself and the second book, the lessor of the two books, is the Bible."

Creation - the first book revealing God's self, I'm not sure I'd heard this before. Yet Jesus taught in language and image of creation, of the lived experience of the people he walked among. It seems over time words, theologies, ideas have come to obstruct or subvert such simplicity. Drawn our eye away from seeing, discerning, looking for the divine presence within the 'what is' of creation.

Before literacy was common Jesus' stories came to be told in image and colour in picture form, writ large, made visible in glass. Stained glass windows became a teaching tool, a way of spreading the good news. The forms and shapes, the landscape and colours of the natural world were and still are used in stained glass windows to communicate meaning and tell story. Not in esoteric word or veiled complexity. Not entirely innocent, after all the person who paid for the window often had a say in who appeared, how the story was told and the symbolism that could be laced through it. Windows form a transparent barrier to the outside, they reveal as much as they conceal, both from outside in and inside out. Glass is made with the elements of creation and for the picture stories to be revealed they need the light of creation. We will learn more of this art after the service today. There seems some metaphor here for us.

Seasons such as Lent offer us opportunity to consider again: who we are, how we live, to what end and for whom. It's not required of us, it's an invitation, we can choose. That season of such ethos continues to exist within the regular framework, the rhythm and cycle of each turning year suggests or perhaps names a need in us. For self-reflection, to reset, reorient, be reconciled. Religious lineages such as Christianity speak of opening ourselves to God. In remaining present, of experiencing a transparency to the one to whom we open ourselves that over time transforms the way we see, the way we see ourselves, the way we are seen. By so doing could it be we come to reveal more eloquently God's self in creation.