



March 2, 2022 begins the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday as we follow the journey of Jesus to the cross and His tomb. While Lent is a somber time of reflection on our Lord's passion and on our sin, it should not be considered morbid as we consider the suffering of Christ. We are to look at the journey of Christ toward His cross, then His death and resurrection as a time of God's mercy on us through His Son our Savior Jesus Christ. The season of Lent takes us to the very center of Christianity, that Christ died for our sins on the cross. While we are called to a renewal of our faith all throughout the church year, the season of Lent especially gives time for somber thought about sin and the sacrifice Christ makes for the world by His death on the cross.

Lent is a journey for us Christians as we follow the events in the work of salvation given by Jesus from Golgatha to His empty tomb on Easter morning. We are led by God's Word into the darkest depths of woe in the life of our Savior **"...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"** Hebrews 12:2b. Yes, there is great suffering for Jesus on His cross, but He endures it all with joy for the knowledge that He brings us to heavenly joy by the woe of the cross. Christ does not turn away from this great suffering but is the Lamb who goes uncomplaining forth for the sins of the world.

We need the assurance of God's love as we make our journey through this world which is filled with everything the devil does to lead us away from faith. We need God's love and mercy each day in our lives as we constantly face the uncertainty of a world governed by people who are equally as sinful as we are. We need God's compassion and assurance as we face pandemics, temptations, stress, and a plethora of other problems both as individual believers and together as church. Our temptations include the human tendency to believe success and joy are more important than salvation. The woes of this world certainly do frighten us, yet God has promised to never leave nor forsake us.

"For our sake He (God) made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" 2 Corinthians 5:21. The very heart of Scripture is that Christ steps into our place and takes our position, that is, He becomes sin for us and bears the full measure of God's wrath for sin, which is directed not at us but at Christ our great substitute. Christ is declared guilty in our place and sentenced to death, for us. The sins of the entire world are charged to the innocent One, Christ our Savior as **2 Corinthians 5:21** so clearly states.

Through our own human efforts, because of sin, we could never achieve the righteousness of God nor accomplish anything by any good work nor any kind of attempt to win favor with God to earn His favor toward us. Because God is holy and righteous and is completely without sin, He cannot stand sin in His presence (Psalm 5:4-5) therefore, we are unable to please Him. We are not able to achieve favor with God through any of our efforts therefore, we stand before God in His courtroom of justice unable to even enter a plea. But God sends Jesus, who steps in between God's righteous wrath against us for our sin and takes our punishment on Himself, atones for our sin and reconciles God the Father to us and we are made heirs of God's grace in Christ. Our sin becomes Christ's sin and Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness in this great exchange. We receive this great exchange and the blessings of the cross become ours as we are buried with Him by baptism into death that just as Christ was raised from the dead so too we are raised by the glory of the Father that we might walk in newness of life (**Romans 6:3-4**).

Lent, therefore, teaches that God has acted favorably toward us and that He views us as His righteous people through the merits of Christ. Through The Word, God makes known to us that He continues to give us forgiveness and strengthen our faith through Christ. Daily, God desires for us to be drawn closer to Him because His love and mercy never ceases being new to us each morning (**Lamentations 3:22-23**). Therefore, Lent brings us back to our highest and greatest treasure. For where our treasure is there will be our heart also as we focus on Jesus as our greatest treasure. Jesus is the One who put Himself in our place and endured the cross, its shame, suffering and death so that we would not, but that we would gain life everlasting by His sacrifice. Treasure the season of Lent in the church year for it shows you Christ's sacrifice. Attend the weekly Lenten services hearing of God's love for you in Christ. Listen to the hymns that tell the story of His passion and of His Divine will that through His death you would live forever. Nourish yourself in Word and Sacrament each time the Word is offered and the Supper is celebrated for it is His body and blood given for you to nourish you to life everlasting.

In Christ, Pastor Ahrendt