



*First of the Month @ CLC*

March 1, 2022

Dear Christ Lutheran Church,

Tomorrow begins the 40-day journey through Lent. Lent can be such a solemn time. Some might even say a hard time. Maybe you feel a little like we have been in Lent for two years.

Observing a period of 40-day disciplines prior to Easter goes all the way back to the 300s. Fasting (going without food) was the common means to observe Lent. St. Athanasius (ca. 339) said that a fast of 40-days for Lent was to be observed by “the entire world.” St. Augustine (ca. 380) said that “we sin if we do not fast” during Lent.

With all respect to the Church Fathers, I will not be fasting for Lent. Nor do I think fasting ought to be for everyone.

Throughout the ages, Christians have found ways to show their appreciation to Jesus for dying on the cross, and to express their sorrow for being the reason such a death was necessary. People of faith have given up a variety of certain pleasures over the years (i.e., food, alcohol, television viewing, social media, chocolate, cigarettes, meat, sexual relations, movies, card playing, etc.), while others have taken on additional tasks (i.e., serving the poor, reading the Bible, practicing silence, giving alms, writing notes of encouragement, daily devotions, reading a spiritual-based book, etc.).

Whatever you do, or don’t do, is between you and God, and if it helps you draw closer to God, then good for you.

What I am not a proponent of is doing things that, in our minds, help us to suffer with Jesus. Suffering seems to me to be an activity that is forced upon someone, not something one chooses to do. Periodic “suffering for Jesus” sounds too much like the ancient practice of the mortification of the flesh, which for me is the wrong way to honor the gift of the human body. I know there are some who have thought that the purpose of Lent is to make us feel lousy. I am not one of them (which is why I will not be fasting for Lent; I happen to like food and so does my body).

Maybe, as a church, we might choose a Lenten practice of deepening our connections. As we all know, these past two years have caused us to be wary of being together, and to suffer the value of “connecting courageously” (one of our church’s core values). While the pandemic is not over (is it now an epidemic?), we are being encouraged with lessening positivity rates and hospitalizations. Maybe for many, we can regather with greater confidence of safety even while we take careful measures.

So, one re-connecting disciplines might be to join a Lenten small group. Many churches add special midweek Lenten services to their schedule; we add small groups. These sermon-based small groups will take a further step in discovering God’s desire for us through the Sunday worship theme. I am excited for this theme as we will be wrestling with how Jesus intends to shape our lives through following the Beatitudes. The series is called, “Life Upside Down.” Call the church office and join a small group. It will be enjoyable, and not something you need to suffer through (note: groups meeting on campus will attempt to be physically distance from one another, and we are offering an on-line small group for those concerned about gathering).

Another re-connecting discipline we will reintroduce into our church is the sharing of peace in worship. Sharing of peace is a valued act in worship. It is not a time to say “hello” to your friends, nor a time to catch up. It is a holy moment to bless others with the peace of Christ, which is healing and hopeful in its hearing and delivery. We will exercise caution in doing this; fist bumps only (no handshakes or hugs), and if the person you are sharing peace with has their hands firmly to their side, then just the words and a nod will do. Again, proper awareness of the needs of others is a way we love one another.

And still another re-connecting discipline will be the return of a Sunday coffee fellowship time. Between the 8:00 and 9:30 service, the front of the church (under the overhang) will be the place for us to join in celebrating this Lutheran “sacramental” moment. Thank you to George and Sharon Pfefferkorn for leading this team. If you are interested in joining this hospitality team, please let them or me know. And not only coffee is coming, but donuts too (selected for you with tongs by a gloved server)!

We need one another. A church that does not “connect courageously” is not a church that I want to be a part of. God made us to be in community, where we share, care, learn, and grow together. C. S. Lewis, in his book, *The Great Divorce*, described hell as a place of intense independence where community is not experienced. For many these past two years have been “hell.” For those who need to continue to be careful about connecting, we will continue to do what we can to stay connected. For others, let’s together commit to a congregational Lenten discipline of connecting courageously, even if it is over a cup of coffee.

Peace,

*Pastor Brian Malison*