

Lent 4, Year C
March 31, 2019
Saint James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

Here we are at the mid-point of Lent,
and I don't know about you, but for me,
so far things haven't gone as perfectly Lenten-like
as I might have hoped.

I gave up sugar for Lent,
yet somehow, some of those coconut bites we have back in the parish hall
have found their way to my plate more than once.

The activity monitor on my watch
still shows an unimpressive lack of effort on my part
on some days.

The room in my house where junk tends to collect
has not yet been de-junked,
despite my earnest promises to deal with it.

The good news is,
we're only a little more than halfway through Lent.
There's still time to address those things that need addressing,
still time to start to make right those things that need to be made right.

This is the gift of Lent.
It is the season for introspection.
In the calendar of the church,
it's like New Year's Day.
It's a time we hit the pause button for ourselves
and evaluate how we're doing spiritually.
Lent urges us to reconnect with God,
and with who we are as the people of God.

This is true for us, both as individuals,
and collectively, as a church.
It's for this reason that today,

we're being asked to take part in a survey.
Today is "Vitality Sunday,"
and every Episcopal church across our diocese of Colorado
is today asking our members – and even our visitors –
to spend a few minutes in self-reflection.

We hope that this exercise will help us to better know who we are.
How do worshipers experience life at St. James?
What are our strengths,
and how can we build on them?
What are our weaknesses,
and how can we address them?

You know, in order for us to become
the people God is calling us to be,
we occasionally have to take stock of just where we are,
and what direction we need to head in.
Maybe we're close.
Maybe it's just over that hill there.
Or maybe we have a long, long way to go.
But whatever our current location,
we have to accept that the journey from here to there
isn't going to be a piece of cake.
There will be challenges.

Let's consider our Scripture lessons today.
In our Old Testament lesson this morning,
Joshua is leading his people into the Promised Land.
This is going to be a land flowing with milk and honey,
and it's a place they all want to get to.
But getting there will also lead to wars and skirmishes for years
as they settle into Canaan.
Not everybody who sets out for the Promised Land
is going to get there.

In his letter to the Corinthians,
Paul talks to us about
the new attitude we'll need to have
if we're to succeed in being God's people.

We can only see the work of God when we're attuned to do so.
How do we stop fixating on all the old things that have passed away,
and begin to appreciate the new creation that is all around us?

The parable of the Prodigal Son
tells us that repentance *can* be real,
and we *can* be changed.
But if we're certain that it's others, not ourselves, that need to change,
we probably won't get it.

I saw a revised version of the Serenity Prayer the other day,
and it's perfect for this Sunday:
"God, grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know that the *only* thing I can change is me."

I could go on and on about each of these lessons,
but I'm going to stop here.
I'm going to keep my remarks briefer than usual today,
so as to buy us a little time
to devote to the work we've been given to do today,
filling out these surveys.

I hope some of you may already have begun them.
In total, it should take 10-15 minutes.
We're gonna take about five minutes right now,
right in the middle of the service,
to work on them.
That's not enough time to complete them,
but it's a start.
If you're going to Coffee Hour after the service
you can complete your survey there.
If you're not going to coffee hour,
but intend to leave right after the worship service,
I'm going to ask you to delay your departure by just a few minutes,
so you can hand it in before you leave.
But please don't leave without completing this task.

And thank you.

We may not celebrate the return of the completed surveys
with a fatted calf,

but we do celebrate and thank God for their return.

Happy are those whose surveys are returned completed,
and whose pencils are put away.

Amen.