

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” – Matthew 5:3,6

Neighbors in Christ,

In the ancient church, Lent was a time for new converts to be instructed for baptism and for believers caught in sin to focus on repentance. In time, all Christians came to see Lent as a season to be reminded of their need for penitence and to prepare spiritually for the celebration of Easter. Part of this preparation involved the Lenten “fast,” giving up something special during the six weeks of Lent (but not on Sundays, in some traditions. Sundays remain as “Little Easters”). I do want to be clear that if you think of Lent as a season to earn God’s favor by your good intentions or good works, then we need to have a conversation. God’s grace has been fully given to us in Christ. We cannot earn more of God’s unconditional love by doing some extra work or by giving up certain other things in fasting. Lent is not the place to make yourself more worthy for celebrating Good Friday and Easter. Lent calls for self-examination and self-discipline and holding Christ central to your life. But, if you see Lent as a time to grow more deeply in God’s grace, then you are approaching Lent from a proper perspective.

Instead of or in addition to fasting during Lent, you might want to add a spiritual exercise or discipline to your life. Or you may want to participate in some act of kindness, such as volunteering at a local assisting living facility or the Sibley County Food shelf in Gaylord. I recommend it being something that you can, in fact, do every day. And it needs to be consistent and realistic. So often we let things slide in our lives if we skip them once, twice, or even three times. Remember your New Year’s Resolutions...me neither. Maybe you might want to consider reading a chapter of a gospel each day of Lent, taking it slowly and meditating upon it. If you start with Mark, you will have time to read all of Mark plus all of one other gospel during Lent. How about going deeper into Luther’s *Small Catechism* and meditating on our Creeds, our Lutheran Confessions, and the explanations of why we do what we do? Or maybe consider a Lenten devotional you can find in your church, or on the internet – there are plenty to choose from and I have many ideas for you. Ask me about them.

So, Neighbors in Christ, as we enter the season of Lent, I am grateful for the saints who have gone before me. No matter what you do in this Lenten season, I pray that God will draw us closer to our Creator, and one another, and prepare us for a fresh experience of Good Friday and Easter.

May God’s peace be with you!

Rev. Erik R. Karlson
Neighbors in Christ Parish