

February 2018

Neighbors and friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you! Doesn't it seem like yesterday we were preparing ourselves for the arrival of Christ's second coming and celebration of the return of the baby Jesus? We gathered with family and friends, enjoyed fellowship and hopefully a great meal, and looked toward a new year in front of us. And now we are nearing the end of the holy season of Epiphany where we recognize the manifestation and signs of Jesus Christ in our lives. The Gospel of Mark begins the story of Jesus' ministry at the Jordan River and our Lord has invited us on a spiritual journey with him. "Follow me," he says. Each day we are called to live into our baptismal promises. These are the same promises the Son of God was given during that glorious day when the waters flowed over his head too.

February 14th brings to us a new season of the church year. But in 2018 this is not about receiving cards, or heart shaped chocolate, and especially not about romantic candlelit dinners. February 14th starts the divine season of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday. On this day, we confess our known and unknown sins in a litany of repentance. Ashes are placed upon our foreheads, or hands, to remind us of our mortality and we are called to return to God's mercy and grace as we are marked with the cross of Christ. The 40-day Lenten journey is a season that may be celebrated with fasting or taking on a new discipline of restraint so that one can later celebrate more deeply and extravagantly something wonderful. But even in that time of preparation, the extreme joy that is to come is known in the here and now.

Every Sunday in worship, the church celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gathers us to receive the gifts of God that came to us through Christ, the saving Word who was made flesh and lived among us. This Lenten season we will hear themes focusing on covenant, stories of promise and blessing, and transformation. And I challenge you to let them come into your own lives by fully experiencing and celebrating the promises God has given you in baptism, being fulfilled in Christ.

One way of preparing yourself and honoring the season is by attending the mid-week Lenten worship, light meals, and fellowship at the three Neighbors in Christ Parish congregations. This year, I have selected a worship series based on the concept of road signs and how their messages apply in our own Christ filled lives. I look forward to these each week about the U-Turn, or the signs we are familiar with: Stop, Merge, Yield, Dead End, and Road Work Ahead.

Lent sometimes brings depressing hymns, judgment filled sermons, burying the alleluias, and a whole lot of other baggage that you may be familiar with. But I say let us enter into Lent with joy and celebration as we prepare ourselves for the beauty and wonder of Holy Week, and the greatest miracle found in an empty tomb. Let us prepare ourselves for the time when we can scream Christ is Risen! And Christ will come again.

I invite you into Lent, and to join me on Sunday and Wednesday worships throughout the parish.

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish