



United Methodist Church of Vista

490 South Melrose Drive—Vista, CA 92081—Phone: (760) 726-0442

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From Rev. Dr. Leigh Ann Shaw



Pastor's Ponderings

Our Lenten season begins Wednesday, March 1 with Ash Wednesday. This Holy day of the year is a hard stop from the regular time we've been moving through. It is a call to focus, to repentance and to seek forgiveness from others and God. Lent is a time of fasting from things which separate us from God.

For many Christians who would rather live as they choose, this season offers a challenge. We don't like to fast from anything. One year, the first Sunday of Lent, I suggested the congregation fast from alcohol during Lent. I was met with a kind rebuke at the back door from numerous people that particular Sunday. I've since quit suggesting what folks might choose to fast from.

Fasting is not meant to be punitive. It is not meant as a spiritual insult. Fasting isn't meant to make you unhappy or feel discouraged. Fasting is meant to guide your focus to God. Fasting is meant to guide you from yourself toward God. So, this year, I begin by asking you if you desire a closer relationship to God? If the answer is 'no', you do not need to change your life decisions during the season before Easter. But if the answer is 'yes', then keep reading.

What our religion offers are traditions during the year when we fix our focus on one thing or another. During Advent, we focus on waiting for the Christ to be born. During Lent, we focus on the gory pain of living to emerge on Easter and claim the joy of life. Pentecost focuses on the celebration that a long time ago, a bunch of people felt the power of the Holy Spirit and was joined for a common journey. I think the language of the church sometimes gets in our way of understanding that we are just a bunch of people connected and dependent on one another for life.

Fasting means giving something up. The tradition for a time was giving up a particular kind of food. Today fasting means giving up something of your own choosing. Perhaps it is food or drink, but perhaps it is anger or resentment. Perhaps you most need to fast from being a workaholic. But perhaps this Lent you might want to give up fasting for Lent and Feast from something during Lent to draw your attention to God.

Feasting during Lent is a valid spiritual discipline. This is not a suggestion to gluttony, but to feast on something, which is self-enriching. Feast on Joy and celebrate beauty! Feast on Love for nature and take a walk every morning as the sun rises. Feast on Family and make time to have dinner at the dining room table during the week. Feast on sleep and make time to sleep enough for your body to be healthy and rested. Feast on Sabbath time and take a pause from noise or busyness. Yes! Feasting is a perfectly valid means of growing your relationship with God if you are seeking that relationship.

Psalm 51 says 'create in me a new heart, O God, and make me like you in all my ways.' Our God calls us to a holy Feast! We've been invited to a life giving and life sustaining meal through the person of Jesus. God is all about feasting on the beauty and joy of life! God calls us to the same.

Will YOU feast or fast this Lent? It's up to YOU. What is it that you need to be closer to God? Take the time...Open your heart for the journey toward Jesus' darkness hour and greatest triumph!

Peace be with you this Lent!

Rev. Dr. Leigh Ann Shaw