



Focusing on Lent

by Lisa Hart



The season of Lent has always been one of my favorite times of the year. The rhythm and rituals have drawn me in and grounded me. As a child, I loved the Wednesday evening worship services. A group of UCC pastors, including my dad, would take on the role of one of Jesus' disciples. Dressed in character, they would visit each other's churches, giving a first-person reflection of that disciple's experiences. I suspect that my dad and his colleagues would tell me that they only did this for a few years, but the experience made such an impression that, in my mind, that was how they always did Wednesday evening Lenten worship. These services, set apart from Sunday worship, had a special way of drawing me in to the stories of our faith.

A couple of rituals that marked the season of Lent were not part of my tradition. I was fascinated by my Catholic friends who had to give something up for Lent. I'll admit, while I was intrigued by the practice, I felt a bit sorry for my Catholic friends. Even school lunch played a part in the rituals. During Lent, you could count on a fish sandwich, grilled cheese or cheese pizza being served on Ash Wednesday and Fridays. I happened to like these lunch options, so it was one of the practices of Lent that I looked forward to.

As an adult, my faith has continued to grow and my experiences around Lent have expanded. Wednesday evening worship continues to be an important Lenten practice for me. I also appreciate some of the other practices that congregations engage in, such as Lenten Bible or book studies, contemplative practices and soup suppers. The practice of giving something up for Lent has also become more common among my Protestant friends. Rather than give something up, I have chosen to add a spiritual practice to my life. Sometimes this only lasts through Lent and other times it becomes a practice that continues after Lent.

This year, like many of us, I've found myself stretched in many directions. There are so many things to be done, and even more that I would like to be able to do. Some of the demands on my time and attention are unavoidable, but some are by choice. I have found that I often have so many things on my plate, that it becomes difficult to focus on getting anything done. It leaves me feeling overwhelmed. So, this year for Lent, I will practice "focus." This will mean slowing down. Setting things aside. Learning to not jump

from one task to another without taking time to breathe. It will mean being more intentional about making time to focus on my relationship with God. My hope, and belief, is that this practice will bring more balance into my life.

As we enter in to the season of Lent, I invite you to consider what spiritual practice you might add. What will help you find balance? What will ground you more deeply in your faith? What will help you live more fully? You may find that you have more than one answer to these questions. If this is the case, do not make the mistake of trying to take on too much. Select one practice and make the commitment to engage that practice during Lent. My hope for you is that you will find meaning, connection and a deepening of your faith as we move toward the joy of Easter.