

A Word from our General Presbyter

Ed Thompson

For some reason, Ash Wednesday usually catches me by surprise, although this year I don't have much of an excuse since the season gets off to such a late start with Easter falling on April 16. Through the years, I have taken on a variety of Lenten disciplines. Some have worked better than others. When I was younger, I would often give up things, like chocolate, candy or cookies during Lent; one year I think I even gave up dessert, which made Lent seem to last a lot longer than it normally does. It's not that those are all bad things to do and it's not that they weren't helpful at the time. However, doing things like that strikes me as missing the point of the season. In more recent years, I've been trying to do things that at least seem more spiritual, and I've tried to focus on taking on some additional spiritual discipline rather than giving something up.

This time I'm planning on doing two different things during the season of Lent. One discipline will be to write down five different things that I am thankful for each day. I've actually done that before, and I found it to be very helpful. It served to remind me of all the good things that are going on in my life, all the ways that God has blessed me. That became harder as Easter approached in that by then I'd used up all the things I was thankful for that seemed pretty obvious. So sometimes I had to really stop and think before I could finish that daily list. Racking my brain in this way, though, often brought back memories of people who had supported me at critical times in my life and who had an influence on my ministry. By the time Easter arrived, I found that I was much more grateful and actually much happier than I was 40 days earlier.

The other thing I'm going to try to do this Lent is to ask "why" at least once each day. Now that may seem odd. It may suggest that I am perhaps trying to channel my inner toddler that has been suppressed for several decades by now.

I've been thinking, though, that there are a lot of things and a lot of people I don't understand. To be honest, I don't understand the results of the last election. I don't understand why some legislators seem to think we need to continue to cut taxes. I don't like to pay taxes. In fact, I'm dreading the thought of having to file tax returns for the state of West Virginia and the state of Kansas for 2016. Nevertheless I think it's appropriate to pay for good schools, for good roads and bridges, and for public radio, among other things. I am willing to pay my fair share of taxes for all this.

Rather than continuing to fuss and fret about the things and people I don't understand, though, I've decided that I need to start asking "why," so I can begin to better understand them. I suspect that's going to be hard for me to do. I am an introvert. I don't like controversy. For the most part, I think people are entitled to be stupid. So I suspect I will fail more days than not with this discipline. I suspect that I will often go to bed feeling guilty and that I will often have to pray to do better the next day.

Just because it's hard doesn't mean that it's not the right thing to do. Hopefully this will be one way I can train myself to be more curious and maybe less judgmental.

What are you going to do during Lent? Will you take something on or give something up? What helps you to be more curious?