

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"A Season of Forty Days"
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First Sunday in Lent

Time goes by in life and suddenly we find ourselves being older than we imagine ourselves to be. Of course, this doesn't happen all at once. You notice how quickly a good holiday passes, or how slowly a difficult time seems to pass. The seasons fly by and just when you thought Summer was here, Winter returns. Lives even seem to fly by. While we were away, Aunt Gertie died. And so did Moey, a good friend of Lynn's Mom. They were somewhat elderly, the first in her 90s and the second in her 80s, but what do those numbers mean any more?

A season is a time with a theme. Fall colours. Winter snow, ice and freezing temperatures. Springtime planting and flowers coming back to life. Summer warmth. And the Church seasons: preparing for and remembering Jesus' incarnation, his first coming as a baby, and the hope and promise of redemption. And then the Epiphany telling us this is for the whole world, not just Israel, or the Middle East. After a little ordinary time, we come into this time called Lent. All spiritual paths have included celebrations of feasting and fasting. If you feast all the time, you don't appreciate the lack that so many endure around the world. If you fast often, you may know some of the spiritual benefits, but you would be a rare person. Tell me if you are that rare faster, fasting outside of Lent.

Times of great joy and overabundance cycle with times of great loss and grief. The Gospel writers knew how their story of Jesus would end before they sat down to write it. We know how the Gospel ends. We know the story of Jesus almost too well. So we practice these forty days to remind ourselves that our Lord chose to follow God through the wilderness. And we are called to do the same. What is the wilderness in your life right now? What is God calling you to talk to Him about in these forty days. Maybe it's your loneliness, your areas of hurting, your long time character defects.

Jesus talked to God about his upcoming ministry, his calling and his complete dependence upon him. The devil wanted to destroy Jesus and make him miserable. He wants to do the same to us. But we are called in these days to know that our lives are more than food, more than the comforts we regularly give ourselves.

We are looking again at our true sustenance and what keeps us going in life. We know that life is more than eating bread, making money, doing the routines of our lives until we are gone. We know that at a very deep level.

But what does sustain you through the most difficult times of your life? What keeps you going when you have every reason to give up?

I'm going to suggest something to you that you probably already know. What keeps you going is your sense of being loved, wanted, respected, cared about, desired, not in the Fifty Shades way, but someone wants to be around you, talk with you, love you even if they don't like you all the time. Romance dies. Sexual encounters without commitment or a long term relationship may give a season of pleasure, but not the long lived love God intends. Porn gives many some good moments, but also usually traps individuals in fantasy worlds.

But the key to keep going is the care and the love that God wants to bring into your life. It starts with God. The rainbow promise of no longer destroying humanity, of forgiving all our current sins and those of our youth, the fresh start every day, as we speak to God, talk to God as we do those closest to us. Give our lives to God. Then we hear God's voice.

God says, as He did to Jesus, just before Jesus went into the wilderness: "You are my beloved child, my son, my daughter. I am pleased with you." This is what kept Jesus' spirit up as he was going through the desert, through the temptations, through the hunger, through the dangers he faced of every kind. Even the wild animals were there and he faced them. And I view Jesus as facing the real danger, just as real as the danger he and his family faced when the death squads were sent out to kill him in Bethlehem.

What dangers do you face in your life these days? I'm talking about more than just driving in our city or crossing the crosswalk as a pedestrian. Do you face the danger of not caring anymore? Have you been hurt enough to no longer want to forgive?

Is there the danger of not making the time or the room for your spirituality, for your relationship with God? I can find time for the news, but I find it hard to find for the Bible. What's wrong with this picture? A danger most of us face in these days is that we have our routines set to the point that I

wonder what God would have to do to find His way into our lives. So Lent sneaks up on us. We have a pancake supper to remind us of the days gone by, when making pancakes was a way to use up the oil or fats, and begin the lean time of Lent. A last feast before the fast, a Mardi Gras.

Of course, Jesus just went right into the wilderness, no Mardi Gras for him. And it seems we don't get to choose our seasons. They are thrust upon us. The ordinary seasons of the calendar and the church seasons: They simply cycle along, as every day comes and goes.

So what you have planned for this Lenten season? Giving up something? Doing extra random acts of kindness? Self-denial doesn't come naturally and it is a good way to see how attached we are to a food or an activity. It is a spiritual exercise. Of course, we need to be wise. But doing without in some small way, speaks to what we think we really need.

Jesus does want to comfort us in these days. The comfort may come through discomfort. The gratitude can come from the lack.

I watched a movie called *The Perfect Stranger*. It's a Christian film, there's another one that is a thriller by the same or similar name, so make sure it is a Christian film. There are actual three films in the *Perfect Stranger* series. I think if you could rent it or get it on one of the TV digital agencies, you might like it. It is based on the premise of what it might be like to be at a restaurant with the Lord, talking through life; or on a plane sitting next to the Lord. What would you say to him? What would he say back? He would certainly listen. What questions would you ask him?

These are good Lenten reflections. Because he is here. Because he does want to speak to you, be with you and love you through whatever you are going through.

The wounded healer we serve is someone who is worth spending time getting to know. More than our religious exercises are those simple moments of talking with God and listening. I hope you make Lent that kind of season. I trust you will.

Let us pray.

