

February 14, 2016

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Sometimes, when the Lenten season starts, I think to myself, “Here we go again.” because it's sometimes a struggle to decide what to give up for Lent. I'm reminded of the time we tried to introduce the concept of Lent to our youngest daughter Caity. The location was Red River, New Mexico. We wanted her to learn to ski but it was also right before Ash Wednesday and the resort promoted it as a family oriented Mardi Gras in the mountains.

Caity thought long and hard about what to give up for Lent...cookies, chips, or candy. She finally settled on corn. When we pointed out that she didn't like corn she said, “Yes, but I have tried to like corn so I'm going to give up trying to like it.” In that moment I was so proud of her ability to think her way around the idea of what seemed to her to be an unpleasant task.

This year, I looked around at what other religious leaders were saying about Lent. One meditation that reached out and grabbed my

heart was one by Pope Francis. Although he is not our spiritual leader he has some ideas that I can really get behind. Francis pointed out that many Christians see this as a time for fasting—on Ash Wednesday and sometimes on Fridays. But he asked us to reconsider the heart of this activity this

Lenten season. He said that fasting must never become superficial and quoted the Christian mystic, John Chrysostom who said, “No act of virtue can be great...if it is not followed by advantage to others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great.”

Now in this message, he did not downplay the sacrifice of fasting because it is a good time for penance. But with penance comes the need to use this time as time of reflection on how we can take that, and then enrich the lives of others. Francis suggested was just as we fast from favorite foods, we must also fast from indifference towards others. In this annual Lenten message wrote, “Indifference to our neighbor and to God

also represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience. He went on to say that in our indifference, we become “incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, for weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though this were someone else's responsibility and not our own.”

This spoke to me in so many ways. This last week, I have been in jury trial with a client, a woman and a mother, who is frustrating beyond belief. A great deal of time during this trial has been spent doing damage control and quite frankly,

there have been times when I wanted her to just disappear. But she won't disappear because in her place, another one will pop up...and then another...and eventually hundreds who just need for me, not be indifferent to their pain and their suffering...and who need for me to hold them as a jury of six strangers finally and irrevocably break the bond between parent and child. They need for someone, anyone, who will listen to the stories of the violence, neglect, and abuse in their childhoods and understand why they are where they are. Why they were cast into the desert and could never find their way out. Since I am on Facebook, I am constantly reminded of what is on people's minds. A few months ago, a Syrian child washed up on a beach in Greece. He drowned during his parents' attempt to flee a war torn country. There was a righteous outcry on Facebook over the death of this child. But let me remind you, that just last week, the bodies of a Syrian mother and her two children washed up on a beach in Turkey and there was not a peep on Facebook about it. People's attention had strayed elsewhere.

Along with our indifference at times, we have become a people of short attention spans. We become outraged over some event or something that someone says, and then a short while later we move on to the next event or statement that makes us angry. We move on to the next issue that we find more colorful or compelling and forget that innocent people are still dying in countries like Syria, young girls are

still being kidnapped and abused in African countries, Mexican people are still dying trying to escape crushing poverty and drug cartels, children, boys and girls alike are still been trafficked by monsters, and there are issues facing us in this country, here and now, that are not being addressed due to indifference and hardness of heart. It's old news.

We should certainly focus on this Lenten season and then keep our eyes on the road that led to the cross...and the path on which Jesus led us and continues to lead us. It's not just about saying, "Jesus died for us sins so we need to fast and dress in sack clothe and ashes". As Dr. Robin Meyer's put it, "Easter is not a transaction for sin but a revelation about God." He said, "For the first half of the life of the church, a crucified Jesus paying the price for our sins was not the iconic image of Christianity. Instead the church considered itself to be paradise restored (and restoring) on earth."

The God that has been revealed to us through the life and death of Jesus is not a god with a short attention span. God cares about us...he cares about the faceless "thems" out there beyond these doors and he is never, ever indifferent. I don't believe that he cares so much about creeds, icons, and doctrines, as he cares about us coming to this table, caring for each other, and then taking our passion for the teachings of Jesus out into the world. I believe that he cares about Beloved Community and how we, through the old, old story remain alive as we seek to heal a broken world.

We need to resolve to give up our indifference in this season as God reveals himself to us through the life of Jesus. We need to cry out with the prophets, with Jesus, and with God for the hurt and pain of the broken. And most of all, we need to do so with his words in remind, “Do this for the remembrance of me.”