

## *From the Rector's Study ~*

I pray each of us here at ECR has an enjoyable Lent. The progress of Jesus through his time of trial is consonant with the journey through relationship with God. A Christian's relationship with God and with the community of his or her fellow Christians cannot be a static thing. Yes, these relationships may be stable and steadfast. However, they also grow and change. This is what makes them like a journey. The focus of the season of Lent is a reflection of this journey, particularly the journey inward.

The journey is an inward examination, but not so much an examination of oneself per se. Otherwise, we can find ourselves on a needlessly narcissistic and circuitous journey to nowhere. Rather, the inward Lenten journey is an examination of the relationship that exists between oneself and God and of the relationship between oneself and the Church. It is a journey of prayer, reflection, study, and labor. Its goal is to discern more clearly one's place and one's role as they are this time and in this place. It is to rediscover the fact that even these most holy relationships are evolving, and the fact that this evolution is itself a gift of God.

Relationship with God and with the community of God's people – these are what define us. Jesus tells his followers that to love God and to love others as one loves oneself are all that really matters. Jesus says that every other rule or guideline derives from these concerns; these concerns sum up the purpose of all the other laws or patterns that we try to follow. In other words, just about everything we do is rooted in our love for God, or lack thereof, in our love of others, or lack thereof, and in our love for ourselves, or lack thereof. And each of these expressions of love, as Jesus points out, is deeply interrelated to the others. The journey of Lent is an inward examination of our love.

Lent coincides, then, with God's urging us to know God's Love and to know our own; to shed the guilt of our love failing to measure up to some inhuman standard, but loving ourselves and others enough to celebrate the blessing of love when and how it happens

to show up; to challenge shallow imitations of love in order pursue the genuine and holier article; to allow ourselves to love; and to allow ourselves to be loved, both by God and by others; to let love be the drama that it is sometimes; and to let love be the easy and ready gift that it often is all around us and within us.

I pray each of us will embrace the gifts that the Lenten season offers to us all. Make this journey step by step. Journey to Sunday morning and Wednesday evening worship services. Journey to weekly Bible Study and to Sunday morning Christian Education. Journey to the Lenten Series. Journey to the special services of Holy Week, the week before Easter Sunday. Journey to the fellowship of Small Groups, Foyers Groups, Dine Outs, the Episcopal Youth Community, the Episcopal Church Women, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, and the Daughters of the King. Journey to the service of the Altar Guild, the Choir, the Thrift Shop, Hospitality Hosting, and serving in the liturgy of worship.

These are gifts from which to choose, gifts to take up and add to your journey; or gifts to claim by sacrificing for a time something else in order to gain them. Make your personal journey to some of these, and see if you don't find it a journey that you make in relationship with your kindred in Christ, and a journey by which find strengthened and enriched your relationship with God.

So, though perhaps a strange wish, yet I pray each of us has an enjoyable Lent. Somber, jarring even, Jesus' journey toward the cross is, nevertheless, a journey through and toward the Love of God. Certainly not joyous in any usual sense, yet it can be for those of us who follow after Christ a journey that we make with a quiet, reverent, but irrepressible inward celebration. A personal joy? Very much so, but not solitary. The joy, like the journey, is a gift of relationship - with God whose joy gives birth to our own; and with our community where joy is shared, where love evolves and grows.

God's Peace.

*Jim +*