

# Explaining Lent

by Bishop Kym Lucas

Have you ever tried to explain Lent without using “church speak”?

I asked this question of a few colleagues and a couple of people on my staff, and we all learned how hard it was to describe Lenten observance without resorting to words and language spoken only in church and understood only by church people.

Nonetheless, I got a few gems that I want to share.

A member of my staff said:

*I had to figure this out quickly one Ash Wednesday when we were doing Ashes To Go. A woman who had never been to church, who didn't have any “churchy” friends or family wanted to know what we were doing and what it meant. So I said, “You know how sometimes life can feel really hard? And you want to do things that make your life better, but you realize everything you're doing is just making it harder?” And she nodded. “Well, for this time of 40 days, we say we're going to make our best effort not to make our lives harder. We're going to pay attention and try to stay out of our own way.”*

A colleague said:

*I get these ashes on my head to remind me that I'm not going to live forever, and that I have no idea how much time I have. And then I spend the next six weeks focusing on whether or not I'm doing the things that will help me become the person I really want to be.*

Yet another explained it this way:

*As part of my spiritual journey, I promised myself, my community, and my Higher Power that I would reject things that lead to suffering: my own suffering and the suffering of others. I promised that I would resist things like greed, selfishness, and hypocrisy. I promised that I would seek the welfare of all people and help those who are oppressed or in need. And every year, I set aside time, for 40 days, and look at my life in light of those promises. I open my heart and mind to being brutally honest with myself about how I am actually doing the very things that I vowed to reject. And then I try to figure out one thing I could do differently.*

I found these explanations really insightful as I considered how I speak about Lent and my hopes for the Episcopal Church in Colorado in this time.

As we embark on this distinct season in our discipleship, I am reminded that unlike Christmas or Easter, Lent does not hold much cachet in terms of commodification or commercialism. As far as seasonal themes go, reflection and repentance do not make good Hallmark holiday fare.

And other than the ashes worn as an outward sign by the faithful, much of what takes place during the season of Lent happens quietly, without fanfare; and many speak about it only within the closed contexts of our faith communities.

In addition, we get so caught up in “what I'm giving up for Lent” we often lose sight of why this season is so important. Lent is about more than giving up cookies or beer or swearing; Lent is about mining the deep riches of what a transformed life looks like.

In this 2020 season of Lent, I invite all in the Episcopal Church of Colorado to spend intentional, prayerful time with your baptismal covenant and The Way of Love. I invite you to examine the “why” of your Lenten discipline and whether or not it has impact for your life when the season is over. I also challenge you to figure out how to talk about this important time in the life of the church with friends and family without using “church speak.”



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