



The Country Courier

News from The Sower's Chapel

March 2023

REFLECTIONS ON LENT

Lent, or the Lenten season, is something that I have never observed. In fact, Lent wasn't something that I gave much thought to until I was called to be pastor here at The Sower's Chapel. Something though, this year, I'm not sure what, has caused me to stop and consider. Is there something about the practice of observing Lent that might be worth a closer look? Here is a description of Lent that I find helpful:

"Lent is the Christian season of spiritual preparation before Easter. In Western churches, it begins on Ash Wednesday. During Lent, many Christians observe a period of fasting, repentance, moderation, self-denial, and spiritual discipline. The purpose of the Lenten season is to set aside time for reflection on Jesus Christ – to consider His suffering and His sacrifice, His life, death, burial, and resurrection."

This year, Ash Wednesday fell on February 22. For those who have not been part of the Ash Wednesday tradition, the day is most recognizable by the people who have had the dark sign of the cross placed on their foreheads. This mark is intended to be a powerful symbol, not so much to others who might see the person displaying it, but to the person themselves. It is a sign of two important things. The first is the person declaring that they identify with Christ and especially with His ultimate sacrifice; the second is to indicate that, for them, the Lenten season, the 6-week period of reflection, repentance and self-denial, has begun.

As I have been thinking about this, it has occurred to me that something equivalent or at least similar might be valuable in our church. Often, as we proceed through the normal busyness and stress of life, we fail to stop and ponder the nature of our earthly and eternal existence. It is easy to be neglectful of the Lord, especially the gift of everlasting life and happiness that He intends to give to us if we are willing to follow Him.

If we are not intentionally setting time aside to consider the Lord and the bigger picture of our lives, then it is easy for Easter to rush up and past us. We might attend worship on Palm Sunday or Easter morning. We might attend the special Maundy Thursday Holy Supper service that will be offered again on April 6. Each of us might have family traditions and celebrations that represent Easter to us. Still, the gravity of the Lord's sacrifice, His crucifixion and resurrection for our eternal benefit, might pass us by.

Lent has begun. Perhaps it is something for you to consider observing privately. Take the time you need to think about the role of the Lord in your life, what He has done and what He continues to do.

As we find moments to prayerfully reflect, it is worth remembering what the Lord teaches us when it comes to what He actually did for us and how His sacrifice is the key for our salvation.

Humanity had descended into a place of extreme spiritual darkness. There was religious and moral blindness everywhere, with people having no understanding of who the Lord their God was. Our forefathers similarly had no idea of what it meant to consciously live a heaven-bound life.

In order to open the eyes of the human spirit to begin to again see the truth, The Lord God Himself came into the world. Through the exercise of uniting His eternal Divine nature to the human nature that He took on in the world via Mary, and thereby making the human Divine also, He made it so that people could once again see Him. People can now, though having some true sight and appreciation of Him, gain a conscience. And, from our conscience we can be inspired to live a good life and be led by Him to heaven.

The Lord Jesus in the world suffered many things in the process of uniting His Divine essence to His human one. He suffered mistreatment in many forms, the final one being His death on the cross. Let us then take time between now and Easter, and beyond, to reflect on all that the Lord has done. We can call this period Lent if we so choose.

- Garry

ARE YOU ATTENDING CHURCH REGULARLY?

It is important to realize how important everyone is to health and vitality of our congregation. Simply put, if you attend regularly, meaning twice or more a month, we thank you. You represent the core of the congregation that keeps us going. If you attend less regularly, then please know how much we would love to see you more frequently. Your attendance means much more than you might realize.

Across the Christian world it has become an accepted truth that worship attendance has steadily declined. There is no known magic remedy for this. Overall, it appears from the statistics that I have read, that less than 40% of the members of any Christian

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Church (this includes Catholics) attend worship weekly. Another 30-40% attend infrequently. Many members never attend at all.

There are many reasons for these less-than-healthy attendance numbers. There are people whose health prevents them. Some people are extremely busy managing the other parts of their life. There are those who have had bad experiences. Others, have simply fallen out of the habit. What's more, the wealthier and more educated people are, the less likely they are to go to church. I guess it is easy to forget about the Lord or the need for church when things are going well.

We all have our reasons for attending or not attending worship, or for making the extra effort to become part of study group. Whatever the reasons that have influenced you in the past, I hope that you will consider whether coming to church, at the very least, is something that you might be able to find more time for in the future. It might even become a new habit.

Your church needs you. I hope that you need your church. Each person brings something vital to the worship experience. It is diminished by your absence and heightened by your presence. Perhaps, if you make worship a little more of a priority, you will begin to find that your week is incomplete without it. Plus, you'll have the enjoyment and peace of mind that comes from knowing that, just by being there, you have helped lift someone else's spirits that Sunday.

- Garry

THE SOWER'S CHAPEL IN OUR COMMUNITY

The Sower's Chapel actively supports many community activities. For thirty years canned and fresh food has been collected for the *Food Bank* servicing the Saxonburg Area. Collections are held at Easter, Thanksgiving, and recently \$285.00 was collected after church for the "Soup-er Bowl".

The *Golf Scramble* held annually over Labor Day Weekend has evolved into an event that has supported the Cabot Food Bank, Freeport Meals on Wheels, and Cote d'Ivoire a Mission on the Gold Coast of Africa. Travis and Michelle aptly organize the event with assistance from others. The associated awards dinner and raffles are social interactions and provide additional revenue. In \$2022 we distributed \$3,300 to four organizations, including MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers).

Annually, Trish organizes the *Angel Tree* devoted to providing a Christmas for needy children in the Freeport area and Prison Ministries. We as a society help fulfill the specific needs of many underprivileged children.

An ongoing recipient of our support is *Ronald McDonald House at Children's Hospital Pittsburgh*. Initially we organized onsite food preparation for long term residents. When COVID policy restricted onsite food preparation, a collection box was placed alongside the regular basket and we have been able to send support of \$1,204 to date. A representative of Ronald

McDonald House contacted Rev. Garry Walsh recently to thank us for our continued support and announced that The Sower's Chapel was named February 15 sponsor for the meal provided by *Olive Garden*.

A donation of \$100.00 is given annually to each of three (3) *volunteer emergency service organizations*.

Supporting these projects provides our members integral association with our local community initiatives.

-Bill Kronen, Treasurer

EASTER READING & DISCUSSION GROUPS

Everyone is very warmly invited to join one of our Easter Reading and Discussion groups. These are wonderful opportunities to reflect of the stories of the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection as described in the Gospel of Mark. The three groups are:

Sunday morning @ 9:30 AM before worship – running from March 5 to April 2

Monday evening online @ 8 PM – running from February 27 to April 3

Tuesday afternoons 1 PM @ 1833 coffee – running from February 7 to April 4

Please note that you are welcome to join these groups at anytime and for only as many meetings as you would like. You do not need to indicate that you are joining beforehand.

For copies of the readings or the link to the online group, please reach out to Pastor Garry at rev.garry.walsh@gmail.com.

MARCH 2023 CALENDAR EVENTS

March 5: 9:30 am – Easter Reading & Discussion

March 6: 8 pm - Online Easter Reading & Discussion

March 7: 1 pm – Easter Reading & Discussion @ 1833 Coffee

March 12: 9:30 am – Easter Reading & Discussion

March 13: 8 pm - Online Easter Reading & Discussion

March 14: 1 pm – Easter Reading & Discussion @ 1833 Coffee

March 14: 7 pm – Board of Trustees Meeting

March 19: 9:30 am – Easter Reading & Discussion

March 20: 8 pm - Online Easter Reading & Discussion

March 21: 1 pm – Easter Reading & Discussion @ 1833 Coffee

March 26: 9:30 am – Easter Reading & Discussion

March 27: 8 pm - Online Easter Reading & Discussion

March 28: 1 pm – Easter Reading & Discussion @ 1833 Coffee