



## *From the Bishop's Desk*

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*On Our Way ~~Transformed By Grace  
Healthy ~ Lively ~ Faithful*

It is the First Sunday in Lent. Under the rubric of details, the preposition "in" is significant here. We usually speak about the "Sundays of" a season because the Sundays are a part of Advent or Christmas, for example. But Lent is different. The days of Lent are days of fasting and penitence, so that "ferve in prayer and in works of mercy, and renewed by ... Word and Sacraments," (BCP, Preface for Lent, p. 379) we may be prepared to celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection.

The difference is that since early on, Sunday has always been considered a feast day focused on celebrating with thanksgiving the resurrection of Jesus. Sundays, therefore, are not penitential days, even in Lent, and so are *not parts of* Lent, but *apart from* Lent though falling within the Lenten time frame.

But why does that matter for you and me? Sundays are a part of the time for renewal through Word and Sacrament, as the Preface notes. In a sense, the Sundays in Lent are juxtaposed with the Days of Lent as dynamic reminders to you and me. In the midst of our repentance for our sins, in the midst of facing into our darkness as individuals and as Church; in the midst of a painful season that holds up to us our brokenness, our hardness of heart, the desert of our souls - that we have each and together created and sustained; in the midst of the consequences of our sin that alienates us from ourselves and one another, breeds division and conflict, nurtures poverty, hunger, war, fear, and destruction - in the midst of all that, we come each week to the simple, clear, steadfast fact of God's redeeming and forgiving love in Jesus Christ.

In the midst of our devastating and devastated realities, God holds up to us another reality: the reality of who we are at our deepest, most fundamental level, who we are at the core of our being: the Image and Likeness of God. God opens to us the possibility of transformation and renewal into who we can become. God gives to us who God is, proclaiming in that act who we are: God is the One who loves us steadfastly, and so we are the beloved of God, always, no matter what.

Through God's gift of Lent and the Sundays in Lent, we meet God as judge who holds us accountable and responsible, *and* we meet God who is love, who forgives and raises us to renewed life, who unbinds us from our sin and sets us free. This juxtaposition within Lent, then, seems to me to be a reality that is dark, and yet it is one through which light does shine, and so it is a season of hope. God in Jesus shows us the way through the dark into the light. God indwells us with the Spirit so that God's acts of steadfast love, forgiveness, and renewal may become for us the patterns of our living, of our building healthy, lively, and faithful selves and a healthy, lively, and faithful world.

I think that at the heart of Lent is not only the invitation to draw closer to God in a direct way, it is also an invitation to draw closer to ourselves and one another with compassionate gentleness. Perhaps this is the unbinding that will set us free in the concrete stuff of daily life. God offers us the opportunity in Lent to pay special attention to forgiveness that opens us to loving and being loved. The Sundays in Lent remind us that God has already done so in Jesus and does so daily with us. Sundays in Lent especially remind us and open for us the opportunity to live anew in the truth that while we are sinners, we are also the forgiven and redeemed and the beloved of God in Christ. The Days in Lent are God's invitation to become the forgiven, redeemed, and beloved for and with one another.

God +bless you each with a good and holy Lent.

*+William*