

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“The Right Kind of Attitude for Lent”**

Psalm 25:1 – 10

First Sunday in Lent

February 22, 2015

Well, here we are again... making our way through another season of Lent. Every year at more or less this same time... we enter into this forty-day period (not counting Sundays!), in which we count down the hours ‘til our celebration of Easter.

Of course, Lent is usually associated with lousy weather... and, in the case of a year like this, *really* lousy weather. But we never let the weather stop us from our Lenten observance. Lent is “on,” even if the climate is miserable. And Lent is also associated with the discipline of “giving something up,” as many people engage in some form or other of fasting... as part of their Lenten activities. And so, for these forty days, not counting Sundays, people might give up sweets, or TV, or snacking, or eating out, or some other form of enjoyable self-indulgence. (And we all know some wise guy who declares that, this year for Lent, he’s going to give up giving things up for Lent... and he just sails right along like he always does!)

And, as we know, the Lenten season is also a time for various fellowship luncheons, and Bible studies, and worship services... such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. So, during this Lenten period we may be a little more immersed and involved in the life of the church... than at other times of the year. All of which means that Lent is a very significant time on our church calendar here at First Presbyterian... and it’s been that way for countless Christian churches all around the world, for very many centuries. Which is good, and fine, and wonderful... and greatly to be commended!

And the only point I really want to make this morning, is that all of these wonderful, seasonal, spiritual things that we do during the season of Lent... will make more of a difference to us, if we approach them properly. All of it: our dogged commitment, even in the teeth of a crummy winter; our various forms of fasting and “giving things up;” our extra time spent reading the Bible, and sharing in fellowship, and participating in worship; it will all be much more meaningful to us, if we do it all with the right kind of attitude for Lent.

And what kind of attitude might that be? Well, if we keep in mind that the main purpose of observing Lent in the first place is to prepare our hearts and minds to hear, and I mean *really hear*, the joyous good news of Jesus’ resurrection on Easter Sunday... than I think that the right kind of attitude to engage in such a quest pretty much consists of two main ingredients, both of which were highlighted in our Scripture lesson this morning from Psalm 25: *humility... and gratitude*.

According to the Psalmist, humility and gratitude are two key characteristics which enable us to see, and appreciate, the good that God has done on our behalf. He reminds us that humility opens our eyes to the *need* that we have for God’s loving intervention in our lives; and that

gratitude helps us to understand that God has, indeed, **given** us that which we need. Hear, again, what the Psalmist says:

“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant.”

And then,

“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.”

In other words, we are sinners, in need of God’s instruction, and mercy, and grace... and God is our Savior, the source of our hope, the One who will never fail to bring us, renewed and forgiven, into the peace of His blessed presence.

That’s about as succinct a statement of the reality of our human condition, and God’s response to it, that you’re ever going to hear. But it sums up beautifully what our life of Christian faith is really all about... and in so doing, it points us in the direction of an attitude for Lent that will really make this season everything that it’s supposed to be.

So, as we make our way through Lent this year, let’s make a special effort to practice a little genuine humility. Not that we’re not ever humble already... just that we can make a point of trying to be more conscious and aware of our need for humility in the days and weeks ahead. And I don’t mean that we should grovel, and beat ourselves up, and hang our heads as if we’re worthless losers. Nor am I advocating a false humility, in which our very effort to be humble becomes a source of prideful spiritual hubris.

No, I simply mean that we can, as we go through Lent, remember who and what we really are: imperfect people... who sin and make many mistakes; mortal people... who don’t live in this life forever, and whose bodies eventually, as we say on Ash Wednesday, return to dust; needy people... for whom the things of this world can never completely fill the void in our hearts and souls; incomplete people... who, in order to be fully whole, must receive that which only God can give.

To have such a humble self-awareness isn’t to be morbid, or pessimistic, or gloomy. It’s to be honest about our human condition, and the need which we all have for the grace, and the hope, and the love which our Heavenly Father is always willing to give us. And it’s that willingness, on God’s part, to give us what we so deeply need... which results in the other half of our right kind of attitude for Lent: gratitude!

The good news of the gospel is that God has **not** abandoned us to the painful realities of our life... which bring us so much sadness and self-reproach. Instead, God has reached right **into** our life... in order to fix everything about us that’s broken; culminating in the joyous resurrection of His Son, Jesus, on Easter Sunday. It’s as if our Lord is saying to us, “I know what it’s like to be you; and I’m here to bring you through it... safe, and sound, and whole once again!” Well, that’s good news! And the only appropriate response that we can make is to say... “Thank you!” And to be grateful!

To live our lives with gratitude for what the Lord has done for us... is to understand, **really** understand, who we are; and who God is; and what He’s actually accomplished in our hearts, and

souls, and lives. It's to realize that God has seen us at our worst; and responded to that by giving us His best. And because He has, we have hope, and peace, and joy that nothing on earth will ever be able to take away from us. *Not... ever!*

So, there you go... humility and gratitude, the right kind of attitude for Lent. The kind of attitude which will transform Lent from just another season on the church calendar... to an opportunity to make real progress in our faith.

May that progress be our goal and our quest; as we make our way through Lent... and as we make our way through life!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!