

A Mid-day Meditation

From

Sue's Perspective

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence
and take not your Holy Spirit from me."* - Psalm 51:12-13

Here we are – Ash Wednesday, 2021. I have been thinking about this for weeks now. What can I say about Ash Wednesday? The name 'Day of Ashes' comes from "Dies Cinerum" in the Roman Missal and is found in the earliest existing copies of the Gregorian Sacramentary. The concept originated by the Roman Catholics somewhere in the 6th century. Though the exact origin of the day is not clear, the custom of marking the head with ashes on this day is said to have originated during the papacy of Gregory the Great (590-604). The long and the short of it is, no one really knows when we Christians started smudging ourselves with ashes as an act of penitence. Somewhere, sometime in our past, someone decided that marking ourselves with the ashes that came from the burned palm fronds of the previous Palm Sunday celebration would be a reminder for ourselves and for those who saw us, the need for us to call out the words of Psalm 51...

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

What are you giving up for Lent? That is the question that many of us have had posed to us for most of our lives. When I was a small child, we had Lenten Boxes in the shape of a church into which we could put our money – usually pennies or nickels, that we hadn't spent because we "gave something up" for Lent. No one ever suggested that perhaps instead of giving something up for Lent, we should **give** something for Lent. It's not about self-sacrifice, about denying ourselves something, it's about sacrificing ourselves in order to serve God and God's people...

and renew a right spirit within me.

Lent is considered the major penitential season in our church year. It is intended to prepare us for the joy of Easter. Most of us want to be smudged, then skip on to Palm Sunday and shout, "Hosanna!!" and then skip on to Easter and shout the "A-word" (I'm too much of an Anglican to say it during this time of year). We are not interested in what happened along the way. We don't want to go there because it is too painful. We want to be Happy Hallmark People, not Lowly Lenten People who recall the hard part of the story. It's as much in the hard part of the story as it is in the happy part of the story that we find God dwelling. It is here that we call out to God...

Cast me not away from your presence

Through the observation of a holy Lent, as prescribed in the Book of Alternative Services (see page 282) we draw closer to God, closer to what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We are not expected to take a wilderness walk, at least not in the same way that Jesus did. What we are expected to do is recognize what it

takes to become the people that God calls us to be. That takes work – hard work. When we stumble, we need to remember to call out to God for help...

and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”

May this Lent be the one that speaks to you in new ways, in ways that draw you closer to God and in ways that renew your faith in Christ Jesus and in humanity.