

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Ash Wednesday; 1 March 2017
Epiphany Seattle

In nomine...

Today, Ash Wednesday, is the first day of Lent.

Lent is a season of remembering,

as we begin our journey toward Easter.

We repeat the same cycle of the church year every year with the aim that
we should remember the story of our redemption.

Ideally we will grow in depth of understanding and in genuine belief
as we rehearse our story year by year.

Lent is a time to remember that story,

an extended period of preparation for the coming of the Easter Triduum,
the Great Three Days that stand at the pinnacle of the Christian year.

Now last week was winter break for my children.

As it happened, I had a conference to attend in Washington DC.

So my entire family made the journey east.

DC is a place for remembering.

I think that's the difference between tourism and pilgrimage:

Tourists go to see *new* things, things they've never seen before.

Pilgrims go to see *old* things, things they've known for a long time,
whether or not they've actually laid eyes on them before.

Christian pilgrims go to see places like Jerusalem, Capernaum, the Sea of Galilee,
or the Cathedral at Canterbury.

In DC my family visited great monuments
that looked like Greek temples.

These monuments contained giant statues of men remembered in the history of the
U.S.

Men we've known from our common heritage of patriotic stories
or in currently popular Broadway musicals.

We gazed upon likenesses of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson.

We went out of our way to find a statue of Alexander Hamilton.

Curiously I didn't see any statues of women:

maybe there weren't any women in the U.S. back then.

While I was at my conference, my family visited the Holocaust museum.

There my daughter Aviva bought a little pin with the Hebrew word, “Z’chor”:
remember.

Remember!

Remember the past!

Don’t forget it lest we allow it to happen again!

Don’t let the evil of the past sink into your subconscious and trouble you:
deal with it honestly and forthrightly!

Hold it up, acknowledge it, and let it give you the determination and the
inspiration

to create a future that is different from the past!

This is why the church has given us Lent.

As we journey towards Easter,

Lent is a time to remember,

a time to reflect, confess, abstain, and fast.

Lent is a time to bury the Aleluia's (our shouts of joy & victory)

and instead to spend some time in humility,

with sorrow and quiet and tears.

Lent is a time to remember things we regret,

things we are embarrassed by,

things we are ashamed of,

things that still have power over us,

things that haunt us and tell us we are less than we ought to be.

Lent is a time to acknowledge those places where we remain

stuck in our own sickness,

self-concerned and hurting.

These dark memories are a universal component of the human experience. Even the most righteous and self-controlled among us, still lives in a world full of ambiguities, grey areas, least-bad choices, and situations without any possible just or satisfactory outcomes.

Lent is the time to pull out those memories and deal with them.

Lent is a season of remembering.

Lent is a season for confession:

whether to a priest, to a friend, to a family member, or to a journal.

In each of these cases, we are confessing before God.

Lent is a time to acknowledge our sins and our regrets.

Because in getting them out into the open, we deny them their power.

By breaking the silence, we place our hurts into their proper proportions and stop allowing them to dominate our lives like overgrown bullies.

Guilt and the shame of sin do not drive God away from us, but us away from God.
In confession we bring that guilt right up into God's presence
and we are forgiven.

(In the BCP there are no alternative endings to the Rite of Reconciliation:
God's answer is always forgiveness.)

We are able to confess because we know how the season of Lent ends:

Easter comes. Resurrection happens. New Life begins.

Therefore Lent becomes a safe and finite container to hold our deepest hurts.

And then Easter comes, year by year, to apply the salve of the Gospel,

so that we might see our wounds gradually heal and shrink

until all that's left is a scar, a memory carved into our person, like a tattoo.

That tattoo remains as a trophy, a symbol of victory, evidence that we serve a living
God,

a forgiving God,

a God with the power to heal even our deepest wounds.

Today is Ash Wednesday.

Ashes are a Reminder of death.

But death in the shape of a cross is victory: the life everlasting demonstrated by Christ.

The cruciform ashes which we use in our Lenten rite today

are a symbol of our common Lenten journey:

our journey of confession, reflection, and trust in God's gracious forgiveness.

Lent is an annual pilgrimage of remembering we have been forgiven.

Today is the first day of Lent. I wish you an easy fast and a Holy Lent.