

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως  
**Ash Wednesday; 14 February 2018**  
**St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster**

**Invitation to Spiritual Disciplines**

*In nomine...*

**I. Intro**

Welcome to Ash Wednesday!

Wednesday is an odd day of the week for most Episcopalians to be in church. Especially during the day. I recognize that most of us live busy lives and being at church on a Wednesday is a choice one makes. Some people have responsibilities that just won't let them be here. For some of you, maybe coming today wasn't too much trouble. But others of you had to work hard shifting other obligations to make your presence here possible. Every one of you made a choice to be here today: for some of us that choice was more fraught than for others.

Ash Wednesday opens the season of Lent. Lent is all about making choices. In the season of Lent, the Christian Church invites us to make choices that we might not have made without prompting, but which nonetheless are the right choices to make. It's like when the doctor offers you advice about how to take better care of your body in order to maintain a higher quality of life. So the Church offers us advice and invitations on how to take care of our souls in order to maintain a higher quality of life.

There have been times in my life I have teetered on the edge of burn-out. My life was so hectic and my job so demanding that I never felt like I had time to enjoy rest, to spend time with my family, or even to take care of myself. I thought in working hard I was doing what I was supposed to do, but it would take me a while to stop and consider exactly what sacrifices I was making. Have you been there, too?

Often the only thing that can happen to bring you back from the edge at that point is to stop and to make some hard choices. I'll reach for a calendar and begin scheduling my time more ruthlessly. Saying "no" can be difficult, but losing it all because I had a major breakdown would be even worse. So I make the changes I need to live in a way that is more sustainable. Maybe.

Caring for our souls involves the same kind of hard choices. Soul-care is an often over-looked component of the life well-lived. The care of the soul often involves specific activities, the most common of which have been known and utilized by Christians and other religious practitioners for thousands of years. In our Gospel today Jesus discusses several of the most basic practices:

Giving to the poor.

Prayer.

Solitude.

Fasting.

These are traditional Lenten practices because they are tried-and-true ways of caring for your soul. These are known as disciplines because they run counter to the consumerism and obsession with feeling good that are the waters in which we swim. These practices, much like physical exercise, will feel strange and uncomfortable to those trying them for the first time. But just as our bodies were made to run and walk and lift and stretch, our souls were made to give and pray and be alone and fast.

You made it to the Ash Wednesday service: observing the Liturgical Calendar is a long-standing spiritual discipline given for our well-being. Good job!

Now that you're here, the Church invites you to consider adding another discipline, trying it on for a season. Maybe the season of Lent.

Giving to the poor.

Prayer.

Solitude.

Fasting.

These are the Christian's path to spiritual health. These are practices that have been natural to mankind for thousands of years: they reflect the kind of life our souls were meant to lead. This Lent I invite you to try one or more of them on for size. It may be a little uncomfortable at first, like clearing out an over-crowded calendar. But you were meant for these things. They will cultivate health, *shalom*, the perfect peace of God, in your soul.