

Rev. Frank F. Wilson
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church
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I Lent, Year "A": Genesis 2: 15-17,3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Title: Take the Time

You know Lent is an old friend.

I mean Lent has been around for a long time. Since the fourth century in fact.

In the first few centuries of the church Lent was the last forty days of a 3-year period of Christian education and formation undertaken by those who would be Baptized in the Christian church. This Lenten period would culminate on Easter Eve when the catechumens would wade into a pool to be immersed in the cleansing waters of Baptism. They would emerge to put on clean, new, white robes -- symbolic of their new lives in Christ, fully forgiven and cleansed of their former sins.

But as time went on and infant Baptism became more and more normative, Lent evolved into a time, a *season* of the church year if you will, when not just those waiting to be baptized, but the **WHOLE CHURCH** would enter into a period of self-discipline, self-examination, and preparation. A time to once again prepare to experience the re-birth of Christ the Savior in the resurrection, and our own re-birth as children of God -- fully loved and absolutely forgiven.

Lent is an important time in our year-long spiritual journey; yet, for many of us, Lent is not something that we easily do.

Self-examination takes a willingness to be self-critical. And we know it can be much easier to be critical of others than of ourselves.

I am reminded that once when I lived near Pinetree Country Club in Cobb County, there was (and still is) a public road that runs right through the golf course. At a meeting one night several members of Pinetree expressed, in no uncertain terms, their concern about speeders on Club Drive and insisted that steps be taken to have this stretch of road targeted by the police for speed limit enforcement. And being persons of some influence, that's exactly what happened. Problem was, the first five tickets went to club members, several of whom had been among the most vocal at the meeting. They were not happy campers. Or to be more accurate, "happy golfers." It is easy to be critical of the other -- less easy to be called to account when it comes to ourselves.

But Lent is a time for self-examination and self-examination can be painful. And it takes time. We are a busy people. We live in a world where faster is better. Fast food, for example, has become the food of choice for Americans. It has been documented, for

example, that every single month 90 percent of American children between the ages of three and nine visit a McDonalds restaurant at least once.¹

Of course, it's not just fast food. It's not just McDonalds. It's Mac almost everything. It's Mac shopping at the mall. It's Mac parenting in between jobs. It's even Mac religion. Did you know that there is a funeral home in California that offers, in essence, Mac Viewing of the Dead – that is, they feature a drive-by window where one can just pull up and, I suppose while simultaneously eating a Big Mac, view the deceased without ever getting out of their car.

We live in a Mac world where slowing down is antithetical to our way of life.

Lent says, "here is an opportunity, a time built into our lives, a time to slow down enough to at least ask the questions: Who am I? Where am I going? And will the paths I've chosen get me to where I want to go. Or are the paths I've chosen maybe leading me to ends I neither desire nor intended? Are the answers to these questions pleasing -- pleasing to ourselves and more importantly pleasing to God?

Lent is a time to take stock. A time to throw out that which needs throwing out and a time to bless that which needs blessing. A time for a sort of spiritual 'spring cleaning' where we discard that which maybe once was useful but now has become a burden, and tidy up that which remains.

And it is a time to identify that which we might think of as garbage in our lives and throw it out. Send it off to the spiritual junk pile and let God deal with it.

That's the real miracle of the Gospel you know. That's the Good News. God is in the waste management business, and God is real good at it. For when we confess our sins, and as the Prayer Book says, "truly and earnestly repent of our sins,... and intend to lead a new life," then our sins are *not only forgiven*, but, as far as God is concerned, they never happened. Oh, to be sure, there may still be some consequences that have to be dealt with. But as far as God is concerned, it's done. It's over.

But in order to get to a place of confession, in order to get to a place of change, you gotta first get to a place where you recognize what it is that is the trouble between us and God. And between us and our neighbor. Between us and who God would have us be... in order to know what to confess and what it is we need to be forgiven for. And that can be hard to do in Mac World.

There was a Peanuts cartoon by the Great 20th century theologian, Charles Schulz, in which Lucy goes up to Charlie Brown and says, "Do you know what is the trouble with you, Charlie Brown?"

In the next frame, Charlie, obviously having thought for a moment, says, "No."

¹Schlosser, Eric, *Fast Food Nation* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), p. 47

In the third frame, Lucy and Charlie are just staring at each other.

In the fourth and final frame Lucy says, "The trouble with you Charlie Brown, is that you don't want to know what is the trouble with you."

Well, maybe Charlie Brown didn't want to know, or maybe he just didn't want to hear it from Lucy, but we do know that there is trouble in Paradise don't we? And we know there has been trouble in Paradise for a long time. We heard something about its beginnings this morning in our reading from Genesis. And there's been trouble ever since.

But only you know what the trouble with you is.

Oh we're pretty good at knowing what is the trouble with everybody else. For some people that can be a full-time job.

And we know what is the trouble with the general condition of the world. We know that sin has to do with worshipping all the wrong gods. And we know the names of these other Gods, don't we?

The apostle Paul gave us his list of other gods in his letter to the Galatians. I quote from chapter 5. Here's Paul's list (at least on that occasion): Fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. End quote.

Well, I'd say that just about covers it.

But actually, no, that is not the end of the list. The list could include other gods such as can sometimes be our jobs, our relationships, our need for power and the means to exercise it, drugs, alcohol, food, money, sex..... the list is a long one.

Pope Paul the Second gave us his short list. I quote from *Prayers and Devotions from Pope John Paul II*: Here's the Pope's short list:

There are three aspects of the world from which the Christian should keep his distance, so as to be faithful to Jesus' message. They are (1) sensual appetites, (2) excessive hunger for earthly goods, (3) prideful self-sufficiency – i.e. I don't need God. I seem to be doing pretty well without God thank you very much.

Well, that's Pope Paul's short list.

But all the lists, whoever is doing the listing, have one thing in common. What sin tends to have in common is an excessive concern for self and things of the self, and a *lack of concern* for the other and a lack of concern for things that are pleasing to God.

Jesus, it seems, following his own Baptism had to undergo yet another kind of Baptism. A sort of Baptism by fire at the hands of the Devil.

Jesus was challenged not so much to do wrong, as he was to do right. BUT to do right for all the wrong reasons and by all the wrong means – ways and means that would have been self-serving and wrongly motivated. Read the text again and you will see that it was so.

But Jesus was not called to be either a magician, nor a show-off, or a political leader. His mission was more, SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT. Jesus was called to call us back from whatever path has led us away from joy. Jesus invites us to throw out that which needs throwing out and to bless that in our lives which needs blessing. In other words, Jesus calls us home. Adam and Eve called it Eden. Jesus called it the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. But he calls us there. And it's his home. And it's our home if we will but take the time to hear the still, small voice that is calling us to it. To take the time to once again look at the map. To do the hard, but rewarding work of self-examination and introspection.

Lent provides such a time. Let us take advantage of it. Let us go to places where the noise in our lives is silenced long enough and sufficiently enough that God's voice might be heard.

Lent is sort of Jesus saying, "You know the trouble with you [now fill in your name], you don't want to take the time to get in touch with what is the trouble with you"

Take the time. It will be time well spent.

Amen.