

L E N T 2 0 2 3

BEING HUMAN

E M B R A C I N G L I M I T S



WHAT IS LENT?

One of the central seasons of the Church calendar is the season of Lent. Lent marks the time from Ash Wednesday until Holy Saturday (the day before Easter Sunday). It is one of the most ancient Christian practices dating back to at least the early 300's AD. It is a forty day fast, with breaks given on Sundays, that mirrors Jesus' fast in the wilderness after his baptism. In her book, *The Liturgical Year*, Joan Chittister writes,

"Lent comes to train us, like spiritual athletes, to keep our eyes, with Jesus, on the road to Jerusalem."

Lent is a solemn season that prepares us for Easter. It is a time to reflect on our lives, the direction they are going and ask of ourselves: How am I living into the reality of being a new creation? How am I stuck in the old ways of my flesh (not my physical body but the part of me that has been twisted by sin and its broken ways)?

Lent is also something meant to be experienced within the context of community. While many of us will choose individual fasts for the duration of Lent, we are inviting you take part in weekly fasts that we will practice together as a community.

Consider inviting others to join you: your life group, a friend, or family members. Each week at our Sunday gathering, we will be coming to the communion table to break our fast as a larger community, to celebrate the provision of Christ, and to declare our dependence on him.

Each week of Lent, we will explore a different vapour we grasp for through a passage in Ecclesiastes. After reading the passage there will be space to reflect on its implications and what it means to embrace the limits of your humanity and receive from God.

STORY

Read through the personal reflections from our pastoral team. What do you relate to? Does their story stir anything in you? How can their reflections help you to better understand your own story?

REFLECT

Take time to work through the prompting questions to reflect on how you may be grasping at vapours and trying to live beyond the limits of your humanity.

RESPOND

Using the guided prompts, take time to respond in confession, asking God to reorient your life around him.

FAST

An ancient practice of the people of God, stretching back well before the founding of the church, is fasting. Fasting is the act of abstaining from something, usually food, in order to focus on Jesus instead. For every vapour considered, you will be invited to participate in a different fast for that week. In Lent, we must be prepared to give up some of the things we look to for meaning in order to journey with Jesus to the cross and receive from him.

How you engage with these fasts are up to you. Some weeks the invitation will be to just fast for a period of time. Other fasts will be for the whole week. Consider what level of participation is needed for you to embrace your own limits most effectively. At the end of the week as your fast comes to a close, we invite you to reflect on how going without has allowed you to go be with Jesus instead. How has life has been different while taking a break from your normal pursuits? Share with those who are journeying with you. Encourage one another along the way.

RECEIVE

Take time to receive from Jesus at the Table of Blessing where we receive from Jesus the goodness and meaning he has for us. Join us on Sunday morning as we come to the Table together.

LIFE IS A VAPOUR

There is a word in Ecclesiastes that is repeated constantly, the word *MEANINGLESS*. When we read the word, we may think of things with no meaning or significance. While that concept is at play in the text, there is more to be found in the imagery. The Hebrew word that gets translated by the NIV as meaningless is *hevel*. *Hevel*'s root meaning is vapour. The word gives us the image of a vapour – something that looks solid until you reach for it and find that it has no substance.

The writer of Ecclesiastes uses the image of a vapour to speak of all the things in our lives we chase after to find fullness, meaning, or significance. Chapter after chapter, we see that the pursuit of knowledge, pleasure, work, position, wealth, and appetite leave us empty and unfulfilled. Though we think that if we can possess, achieve, or accomplish one of these things we will find our meaning, our humanity, we soon discover that in the moment of grasping and holding on, the vapour disappears.

None of these things are inherently bad. Indeed, they are part of what it means to be human and to enjoy the goodness God has intended for us. However, they cannot be enough for us. We are created to find our fulfillment in the Triune God. He alone can be our source of ultimate meaning.

In some ways chasing after meaning apart from God is an attempt at achieving our own sense of divinity, of rising above the frailty of our humanity to make something lasting for ourselves.

To be human though, is to live with limits, to live with the inability to satisfy our ultimate cravings, and to live with the recognition that no matter what we achieve, possess, or accomplish, one day we will die.

This Lent season we want to embrace our humanity and our limits through the lens of each of these vapours, and become wholly dependent on God as our source of ultimate meaning.

FEBRUARY 22 - 25

ASH WEDNESDAY

"For dust you are and to dust you will return"

Genesis 3:19 NIV

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. It calls us to recognize the brevity of life and to remember that just as we have been made of dust, we will one day return to it. It's easy to go about our days thinking that we will live forever, but the reality is that our days are limited. Ash Wednesday functions to interrupt us from the rhythms of life, reminding us of our human frailties. It challenges us to consider how we are living, what we value, and the ways we use our time.

If we let it, Ash Wednesday can work like a reset button. It can reestablish our true orientation – life with Christ in the kingdom of God. We allow our perspective to be renewed. Because life is a vapour, we acknowledge that we don't have time to waste, waiting for tomorrow.

As you enter this season of Lent on this Ash Wednesday take some time to reconsider your life, your death, and the direction your life is taking.

On Ash Wednesday we will be having a quiet and reflective service where there will be space to prepare for Lent through confession, and also in receiving the ashes as a mark of the beginning of the Lenten season. In preparation for the service, or if you can't attend, we encourage you to ask these two questions.

What do I need to confess before entering into Lent?

Is there anything I need to give up before entering into Lent?

As we gather together for our Ash Wednesday service, at 7:30PM February 22, there will be space to continue asking these questions and to respond in confession and repentance.

KNOWLEDGE

FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 4

The world has changed so much in my own lifetime when it comes to accessing information and gaining knowledge. I was telling my kids the other day that there was a time, in the not so distant past, when the only way to know what was happening in the world was to wait for the evening news on tv, read it in a newspaper the next day, or happen to catch an update on the radio. Miss the news broadcast, the paper delivery, or the radio transmission, and one could be blissfully unaware of almost anything happening outside of the neighbourhood. There were also things called encyclopedias that held all sorts of wonderful information as long as you were ok working with data that was always a couple of years old by the time you had the chance to read it.

As you well know, this is not the case anymore. The information and knowledge that we literally hold in the palms of our hands now is greater than any other time in human history. We have ‘as-it-happens’ access to any story, incident, disaster, conflict, or cultural moment that we happen to have interest in. Without delay we can google it, Wikipedia it, or find an up to second feed on one of many social media platforms. If knowledge is power, then we’ve probably been given more power than we know what to do with.

Ecclesiastes reveals that the pursuit of knowledge as a way to find meaning and stability in life is like chasing after the wind and that with more knowledge comes more grief. This is not to be understood as being a position of anti-education, anti-learning, or anti-intelligence. It is, however, a warning about being puffed by how much we know and counting on our intellect to give us the foundation of purpose in our lives.

For this season of Lent, we have the opportunity to boundary the constant inundation of more information and create more space to quiet our hearts in the presence of God.

WADE PATON

READ

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

REFLECT

What are my human limits when it comes to pursuing knowledge?
How has the pursuit of knowledge taken the place of God in my life?
What meaning have I been deriving from knowledge?

RESPOND

As you say aloud these confessions, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender.

*I confess that I am human and that I have limits.
I confess the ways that I have been chasing after a vapour.
I confess that you are God and I am not.*

FAST

As a way of living into your confessions, consider fasting from reading or watching your go-to news source this week.

RECEIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-13.

Psalms 23 tells us that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, even death itself. He gives good gifts to his children.

Ask the Spirit to reveal what God wants to set your Table with.

PLEASURE

MARCH 6 - 11

I'm sure a lot of us can relate to having busy lives. There are things that we simply need to do out of necessity. Paying bills. Grocery shopping. Taking your dog to the vet because they ate an entire onion. And after a while, life feels draining. And when we finally have free time, we try to compensate for the pleasure that we missed out on. Bingeing your favourite TV show, continually scrolling on social media or anything that keeps your mind distracted and your heart happy. Or maybe there are things you don't want to confront, pains you don't want to face, so you chase pleasure to bring relief.

I live a pretty busy lifestyle, and I usually enjoy it. but I've found that when life gets crazy busy, or when I get stressed out, or when there are things going on that trouble me and I don't want to deal with them, I use pleasure as a coping mechanism and to help make up for all the enjoyment I've missed out on.

Instead of bringing all my tiredness, my hurts, my fears to Jesus, I do things that distract me from it. I try to bring fulfillment to my emptiness with all of the wrong things and it makes me think that I'm free from all the pains of life. But it's a lie. Chasing things that bring you temporary satisfaction don't free you from the bondage of burdens, but further chains you down.

If I'm to offer anything to you, it's this: Jesus wants freedom for you. He can bring light to the darkness, and true joy and life enjoyment in the midst of pain. He wants your attention because he knows that our meaning and hope is best found in him. And when our focus is solely on him, we become receptive to the incredible workings of His Spirit and what he is wanting to do in us and through us for the sake of others and the whole of creation.

BEN MUELLER

READ

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

REFLECT

What are my human limits when it comes to pursuing pleasure?
How has the pursuit of pleasure taken the place of God in my life?
What meaning have I been deriving from pleasure?

RESPOND

As you say aloud these confessions, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender.

*I confess that I am human and that I have limits.
I confess the ways that I have been chasing after a vapour.
I confess that you are God and I am not.*

FAST

As a way of living into your confessions, consider fasting from what you cheer yourself with – what entertains, distracts, or delights.

RECEIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-13.

Psalms 23 tells us that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, even death itself. He gives good gifts to his children.

Ask the Spirit to reveal what God wants to set your Table with.

WORK

MARCH 13 - 18

Work is an inevitable part of our lives – perhaps an all-consuming part of our lives. None of us are exempt from it. To provide for ourselves and our families day to day, to care for our homes, to prepare for our future, to fulfill our dreams, we spend a significant part of our days and lives working. Much more time working than not working.

I grew up working alongside my parents and siblings as a farm kid. The don't-shy-away-from-anything, hard-work ethic instilled in me because of this is something I am grateful for. I learned how to be responsible, manage difficult tasks and be a team player. I like to work and have always welcomed the challenge of it.

As life has gone on though, my work and the weight of responsibility that comes with it and with life in general, has threatened to overwhelm and become all-consuming, as I'm sure many can relate to.

The practice of benevolent detachment has become life-saving for me. It is the practice of simply *giving everyone and everything to God*. A conscientious turning over of all-consuming responsibility. A reminder that I am in control of no one and no thing. As I catch moments in my workday of praying this breath prayer, it pauses me and creates a pocket of peace and rest where I am reminded to let God be God, the one reigning above it all, and to let myself be a human being with needs and limitations.

Likewise, the intentional practise of rest or sabbath postures us to trust that we have enough. That in ceasing from work for a period of time, to allow our bodies, souls and spirits to be renewed through rest, God will continue to provide for our needs.

KIMBERLY MCELROY

READ

Ecclesiastes 2:17-23

REFLECT

What are my human limits when it comes to pursuing work?
How has the pursuit of work taken the place of God in my life?
What meaning have I been deriving from work?

RESPOND

As you say aloud these confessions, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender.

*I confess that I am human and that I have limits.
I confess the ways that I have been chasing after a vapour.
I confess that you are God and I am not.*

FAST

As a way of living into your confessions, consider fasting from work one day this week – take a true Sabbath.

RECEIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-13.

Psalms 23 tells us that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, even death itself. He gives good gifts to his children.

Ask the Spirit to reveal what God wants to set your Table with.

POSITION

MARCH 20 - 25

All of my life I have lived with hopes and dreams of better, higher, more impressive position. It starts from a young age for most of us, I think.

“When I grow up...”

An innocent phrase, full of creative promise and wishful dreaming. When I was young I remember trying to imagine what I would do as an adult—with all of the free time that comes from being out of school. (Hah!)

I would make, and re-make my lists of position: when I grew up, I would be a teacher, a librarian, and probably a life-guard. If that wasn't quite fulfilling enough, I would write in my downtime and (obviously) become a famous author. And, if I needed a little extra income I was certain I could manage to pull a shifts working in a McDonald's too (think of all the fries, yum!)

As an adult, I can now confidently look back on those plans and laugh, recognizing that my capacity is much more limited than little-me would have hoped.

But isn't that the truth for us all? We are finite humans, limited in time, space, age, wealth... and position. Yet, even in those limits there is something undeniably beautiful and freeing (if we let it be) about not having to be everything for everyone all at once.

I no longer feel like I need to use all of my gifts and hobbies and talents to prove myself. I do not need to be everything and do it all.

But even as a child, position—wealth, fame, an outstanding ability to do it all—drove me. What a relief that Jesus simply calls us to him, to submit ourselves and our position in life to him who guides it all. His promise is worth so much more than our position—that we are beloved children who are known and loved regardless of our position, wealth, or ability.

AMANDA KRAUSE

READ

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16

REFLECT

What are my human limits when it comes to pursuing position?
How has the pursuit of position taken the place of God in my life?
What meaning have I been deriving from position?

RESPOND

As you say aloud these confessions, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender.

*I confess that I am human and that I have limits.
I confess the ways that I have been chasing after a vapour.
I confess that you are God and I am not.*

FAST

As a way of living into your confessions, consider fasting from taking credit for things you accomplish. Fast from image management this week, whether in real life or on social media.

RECEIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-13.

Psalms 23 tells us that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, even death itself. He gives good gifts to his children.

Ask the Spirit to reveal what God wants to set your Table with.

WEALTH

MARCH 27 - APRIL 1

Feast or famine. Some propose that this saying can be traced back all the way back to Genesis 41 when Egypt experienced seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. Even so, it sits on the psyche of different generations, cultures, and socio-economic realities differently. For some, it may bring them back to memories of the Depression Era, war times, or different recessions. For others, it might speak to their experience as a seasonal or gig worker. For me, it represents my life as a farm kid.

Though as a child I was not acutely aware of the financial realities that existed in our family, the rhythms of feast or famine certainly shaped my relationship with money. It was only a few years ago while I was talking to my dad about what it was like on the farm that he articulated some of those days of struggle – quietly stressing about whether there'd be enough to put food on the table or pay the bills and mortgage.

In the middle of this conversation, Jesus revealed something in me. In an attempt to shield myself from the anxiety I had internalized as a kid about hovering around the poverty line, I had created my own poverty line. As Jesse and I hit different financial milestones as young adults -- paying off student debt, starting to save RRSPs, buying a home, etc. -- instead of looking at these assets as blessings and resources for generosity, I would put a wall around them in my heart and mind and then live month to month as if we were barely making it. I would hoard, and worry, and stress about unexpected expenses. Though we had plenty, were investing wisely, and were spending responsibly, I had no sense of freedom in our wealth. It was never enough. The line would just move.

I had made wealth into an insatiable idol, less by pursuit of accumulation and more by fear of decease. Once I accepted the limits of my control and chose to trust God as my ultimate Provider, finances were no longer the anxiety trigger they had once been. I could spend by faith. I could save by faith. I could invest by faith. And I could be generous by faith.

SHELEENA BOULIANNE

READ

Ecclesiastes 5:8-17

REFLECT

What are my human limits when it comes to pursuing wealth?
How has the pursuit of wealth taken the place of God in my life?
What meaning have I been deriving from wealth?

RESPOND

As you say aloud these confessions, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender.

*I confess that I am human and that I have limits.
I confess the ways that I have been chasing after a vapour.
I confess that you are God and I am not.*

FAST

As a way of living into your confessions, consider fasting from non-essential purchases this week.

RECEIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-13.

Psalms 23 tells us that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, even death itself. He gives good gifts to his children.

Ask the Spirit to reveal what God wants to set your Table with.

APPETITE

APRIL 3 - 8

One thing that I have fasted from a few times during Lent is from snacking, from that late night trip to the pantry for whatever burst of sugar I can find. A handful of chocolate chips, potatoes chips, some lingering halloween candy that has miraculously survived all the way to Easter (just in time for the influx of Easter candy). I remember one year telling a friend about this fast, and he looked at me with confusion about why I would ever do that for Lent, why this would be a “spiritual” fast.

I was prepared for this, because in my mind it felt lame to say that I’m fasting from snacking.

I noticed that snacking was a place that I had no self-control in. That I would feel a craving and I would satisfy it immediately, even though I knew it would be bad for me. And it wouldn’t stop with one handful. It would become two, then three, then a stomachache of regret. The author of Ecclesiastes writes “everyone’s toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied” (Eccl. 6:7). This was my experience. Hence the Lent fast. I needed to put in some hard work partnering with Spirit in His work of growing His fruit in my life. I needed self-control, and so a fast from something that was trying my self-control was in order. It was saying to the Spirit, “I can’t handle this right now so I’m giving this to you, will you help me?”

My friend looked at me, said something innocuous and we moved on to whatever we were doing.

Part of being human means that you recognize that you have limits, that you don’t have unlimited power, unlimited strength. So we recognize our limits, and we turn to the God of mercy and compassion, who helps us in our trouble knowing there’s no limit to his mercy.

MATT KINNIBURGH

READ

Ecclesiastes 6:7-12

REFLECT

What are my human limits when it comes to pursuing food?
How has the pursuit of food taken the place of God in my life?
What meaning have I been deriving from food?

RESPOND

As you say aloud these confessions, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender.

*I confess that I am human and that I have limits.
I confess the ways that I have been chasing after a vapour.
I confess that you are God and I am not.*

FAST

As a way of living into your confessions, consider fasting from food for a 24 hour period.

RECEIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-13.

Psalms 23 tells us that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, even death itself. He gives good gifts to his children.

Ask the Spirit to reveal what God wants to set your Table with.

HOLY WEEK

APRIL 2 - 8

We invite you to join us for a journey through Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter Sunday. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, when we remember the Triumphal Entry as Jesus approached Jerusalem to the celebration of the people. As soon as the shouts and praises quiet down though, we recognize that Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem will result in his death. Jesus knows where this road is leading, and yet, he still has to walk through the week. Everyday this Holy Week we will sit with Jesus in the book of John, walking with him as he walks towards the cross.

Please plan on coming to all four of our Holy Week services as we practice the way of Jesus together.



PALM SUNDAY - APRIL 2 | 10 AM



GOOD FRIDAY - APRIL 7 | 10 AM



HOLY SATURDAY - APRIL 8 | 7:30PM



EASTER SUNDAY - APRIL 9 | 10 AM

Take time to slowly read the stories.

What is Jesus like in these stories?

How is he aware of his death?

What does it mean to identify with him in his sufferings?

PALM SUNDAY | John 12:12-19

HOLY MONDAY | John 12:1-11

HOLY TUESDAY | John 12:20-36

HOLY WEDNESDAY | John 13:18-32

MAUNDY THURSDAY | John 13:1-17, 31-38

GOOD FRIDAY | John 18:1-19:37

HOLY SATURDAY | John 19:38-42



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www.spaonline.com
info@spaonline.com
780.963.2082

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