

We, as people, a community, a country, a world, still find ourselves surrounded by an unseen enemy that floats in and around us and those we love, silent and dangerous. We don't know where to go to be safe, where to be secure or where we can go to feel normal once again. It is the middle of August and we have been dealing with this *thing* since February or maybe even earlier and we are weary of it, tired of keeping "socially distant" and always being careful, so very careful. And we don't have any kind of definitive answer or even a clear and concise plan that will lead to a certified outcome, accompanied by a firm date, that declares that COVID-19 is behind us forever, once and for all. And so, we wait in the shadowlands that have become our existence. In some ways it seems to me to be a little like the way we view Lent in our Christian liturgical year.

There are two seasons of waiting in our liturgical calendar. The first is Advent, a time to prepare for the birth of the Christ Child. It is the less penitential of the two, and one that often asks us to think about the season of waiting and preparation with (sort of) the same mindset we would have preparing our home and hearts to welcome a new child into our families. And of course, it leads up to Christmas; well, let's be honest, it is commercially overshadowed before and during, *by* Christmas!

Lent, however - Lent is different. When it begins is never the same, yet we are always in that rather in-between time, after Christmas and before spring. It is a time that lends itself to existing in shadows, to slowing down. Lent calls us not only into a time of waiting, but a time of searching, a time of fasting, a time of study. We are called into a time of quiet both by nature and the church, as we begin to journey with Christ on that final journey to Jerusalem, to His final days on earth. Lent pulls us ever deeper into the passion of Christ through our liturgy as well. We move from the Sundays minus the "A" word and prayers and hymns that foretell of the coming passion, into the passion itself found in Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday liturgies, all leading to the Great Vigil of Easter which appropriately begins in the shadows of a darkened nave and ends with light, joy and Alleluias. While we may hurry our way through Advent into Christmas, we start Lent out slowly and continue on that deliberate path with steadfast faith and purpose, through to the joy of Easter.

I returned to Minnesota early, on March 19th, just a day after you received word that worship and activities at St. Christopher's would be shuttered for the foreseeable future. I first entered into St. Christopher's some weeks later, on or around April 25th, to record a sermon. I walked into the sanctuary, turned on the lights and took in what I was looking at. Time was standing still. Although it was well into April and Easter had come as planned on the 12th, in the sanctuary it was still Lent. The Stations of the Cross were still on the walls, the curly willows wound about themselves behind the altar party's chairs, the hangings were purple and the box that I know held the Alleluias was still under the altar. And somehow it seemed right. As I walked down the aisle to the ambo to record the sermon, I was keenly aware that St. Christopher's continued to exist in shadows; to searching, to fasting and to slowing down. In short St. Christopher's, metaphorically speaking, remained in Lent, providing an outward and visible sign of the place in which we find ourselves. There have been some changes, the hangings are now green and the curly willows are gone but the nave

remains in that time of shadows and waiting. Perhaps the most poignant symbol of all is the box under the altar that waits with steadfast faith and purpose to release the Alleluias.

Now, as I walk into the nave to participate in the taping of the service for the upcoming Sunday morning, I find myself treasuring the fact that the church, along with the rest of my world, has slowed down. Much like the season of Lent itself, we are caught in a moment in time that begs us to slow down, to wait with patience and to move ahead with caution. I treasure the fact that the Alleluias aren't ready to come out of the box just yet, and I treasure the fact that we as faith community are moving with the steadfast and faithful pace that Lent requires. Lent helps to refresh our memories in the discipline of fasting - giving something up that we value - that speaks to our core beings, that makes us better for having let that something go for a while. Lent entices us into making our journey with Christ. Lent is patient, steadfastly waiting and persistent in the discipline it encourages us all to take upon ourselves.

I am glad that the sanctuary remains in that Lenten mode, grateful that it calls me in to a Lenten frame of mind that speaks to moving with caution, going slowly, safely toward what will be our new normal. And most importantly, assures me that it is all right to not know the when and the what the future of church will be, apart from not being the way it always was, and that through all of this change and the change that is yet to come, we are walking with Christ.

Blessings, Deacon Janet