



*“The Lord will guide you continually,
And satisfy your needs in parched places,
And make your bones strong;
And you shall be like a watered garden,
Like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
You shall be called the repairer of the breach,
The restorer of streets to live in.”
(Isaiah 58. 11-12)*

Greetings beloved of God,

On the eve of Ash Wednesday I am writing you about the new season of Lent that begins for Christians around the world tomorrow.

It's been said that Ash Wednesday is the day we attend our own funerals as we are marked with an ash cross on our foreheads. *"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."*

It's also a reminder that eternal life is given to us by God's gracious gift through Jesus Christ.

This is an invitation for us to make this Lent a holy time through prayer and penitence; by giving more generously and by reading and meditating on God's holy word.

The air always feels different in Lent, doesn't it? Heavier, as we examine our lives individually and collectively, reflecting on how we have failed to love as we have been asked to love and how we have failed to serve Christ in the world as we have been called upon to do.

Lent will be even heavier this year because of Covid fatigue. Therefore let us be extra mindful of this in our Lenten journey as we continue to be kind to one another, tender hearted; bearing one another's burdens.

Once again, because of Covid and its variants, as well as its persistence in some of our communities in Northern Ontario, gathering in person is not an option for us. We will be living Lent virtually, until Passion Sunday at the earliest. This is not easy because we love to live our faith in community connecting with others as often as we are able.

In an email to me last week about the variants and the importance of vaccinations, epidemiologist Rev. Michael Garner, who is an advisor to the House of Bishops, wrote about the power of distancing, masking, and limiting contact as a means of controlling the virus. As we have already seen in countries like Australia and New Zealand which are almost back to normal.

Rev. Michael went on to say, *"I think that is the most amazing thing about it, the power of individual decisions on society. I am not sure there has ever been such a stark example."*

The individual decisions we make over the next 40 days have the potential to have a huge impact on the pandemic, and also on how we begin to recover from it.

Often economists use letters like W, V, or U to talk about how the recovery period from a recession may look if plotted on a graph. In the case of this pandemic the letter K is being used, describing how one segment of the economy begins to climb upward and recover well, while the other segment continues to suffer. Why this divergence?

The theory is that it stems from pre existing social and economic divides that are exacerbated by the recession. Essentially what happens is that the gap between those who are doing well and those who are not widens even further.

This Lent is a Kairos Moment for our church, exhausted though we may be, in the words of the holy prophet to be like a *watered garden*, like a *spring of water* and become, “*repairers of the breach, restorers of the streets for people to live in,*” as the ruins from Covid are rebuilt.

The church collectively, and we, as individual members of it, have always been involved in servant ministries of reaching out to the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the abused.

This particular time is also a God given moment for us to use our prophetic voices and courageously speak ‘truth to power’, in love, for the voiceless ones as we work towards a more just global society.

Perhaps the darkness of Christ’s tomb this Easter could be viewed as a womb, a birthing place for a new beginning of God’s reign here on earth.

Even on the Eve of Ash Wednesday we remain an Easter people who believe in the power of the resurrection.

In her prose prayer *On the Eve of Ash Wednesday*, Beth Richardson writes,

On the eve of Ash Wednesday

Take this frozen and tired soul, loving God.

Nurture within me sustaining life.

Let me shed the darkness

That I might reach toward your light.

Let me empty the cluttered spaces

That there may be a home for you.

Melt me, mold me, fill me use me

On this Eve of Ash Wednesday.

With every blessing for a holy Lent, I remain yours in Christ,

+Anne