
WHY LENT STILL MATTERS

You can't have Easter Sunday without a season of Lent

By Michael Hidalgo

February 18, 2015

There is a Sunday every spring different from all others. Everyone dresses a little nicer than usual. Women wear floral dresses and men squeeze into the discomfort of a suit accented nicely by a pastel tie. People flock to church buildings early to beat the larger-than-normal crowds, and the energy in church buildings is at an all-time high.

The worship services are decidedly upbeat, and everyone is in a good mood. Often someone stands up front and says, *"He is risen."* The congregation replies in unison, *"He is risen indeed!"* As soon as the worship service ends, the church buildings empty quickly as faithful worshippers go to devour a celebration feast.

I am speaking, of course, of Easter Sunday.

While this Sunday was the height of excitement for so many, it honestly meant very little to me for most of my life. I know that may sound like a terrible thing to say, but it is true. Every year the story was the same: some women gathered spices for Jesus' body, went to a garden, saw the stone was rolled away from the tomb and an angel said Jesus had risen.

As exciting as the pastor tried to make it, I knew the end of the story, and the punch line had less power year after year. Beyond that there was the Monday after Easter. What was celebrated just 24 hours earlier seemed to matter little. Everyone had gone back to work, and life was, well, completely normal. The resurrection all seemed quite shallow.

Over time, our hearts and souls, when left unattended, get messy. Lent invites us to deal with the mess. Lent invites to roll up our sleeves and sort through the debris of our lives.

You may know exactly what I am talking about. The hype, the excitement, the candy, the eggs and even the resurrection can seem to fall flat. Like any other holiday, it is here and gone before we know it. In this we have a choice: we can accept this is just how it is or we can move toward Easter differently.

Which brings us to Lent.

The word Lent comes from the Latin root meaning *"to lengthen."* It reminds us that during the season of spring, the sun takes a little longer each evening to settle beyond the horizon. With this, the weather grows warmer, and life emerges once more. Lent is our connecting point to the season of life.

But this is a messy season. As the snows of winter lie on the ground, things get covered, trampled and windblown. Winter brings with it chilling winds that push things over, mess things up and even break things. As the snow melts we are left to discover the trash, the litter, the mud and the branches beneath the snow.

It's much like our lives. Over time, our hearts and souls, when left unattended, get messy. Lent invites us to deal with the mess. This is not about quickly cleaning things up and pretending they were never there, nor is it about ignoring the mess. Lent invites to roll up our sleeves and sort through the debris of our lives.

We are confronted with our mess, and so on our foreheads we rub a little dirt reminding ourselves that just as Eden has gone to ashes, so, one day, we will too.

The first time I observed Lent over 10 years ago, I attended an Ash Wednesday service. Ashes were applied to my head and words were spoken over me, *“Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.”* I learned in a new way that I am a mere mortal, and at same time created in the image of God. In that moment, something new in my soul began to grow. At the same time, it was, for me, a difficult time of coming to grips with my brokenness, staring at my sin and searching my heart.

This is what Lent does. It allows us to see the parts of ourselves we’d rather leave covered up. It asks us to drag our full self into the light of day no matter how dark it may be. As we near the end of Lent, we encounter Good Friday. For centuries, the people of God mark this day by participating in the Stations of the Cross remembering the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

One station remembers the words Jesus cried while being crucified, *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”* That one phrase sums up the darkness of Lent. At the point of Jesus’ death, He experienced the abandonment of God. He was naked, beaten, bleeding, dying, nailed to an instrument of torture and death, crying for a father only to realize His dad was nowhere.

Lent and Good Friday invite us to brush up against the death of Jesus as we sort through the death in our hearts. Good Friday is the moment when Jesus’ death and our sin crash into one another. And in that moment we ache for Easter.

The difference between Easter feeling shallow and Easter meaning something is simple and painful: death. The reason the resurrection felt so shallow to me for so long was because there was never any death. And you cannot have a resurrection without a death. This is why Lent is so important. It brings us face to face with our mortality and the death of Jesus.

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A few years ago, I, along with several pastors from Denver, joined together for a sunrise service. There was the common story once again: some women gathered spices for Jesus’ body, went to a garden, saw the stone was rolled away from the tomb and an angel said Jesus had risen.

But this time when we read the words, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he is risen!”* Almost on cue, the first rays of sunlight broke over the skyline of Denver, and tears of joy welled up in my eyes.

The tomb was empty. And it meant something.

Easter reminds us that in the in the Kingdom of God, death doesn’t have the last word; life does. Ash Wednesday, Lent and Good Friday teach us the resurrection is something we desperately need—for our broken selves and our broken world.

And so, as we enter into this Lenten Season, may we remember we are dust and to dust we shall return. May we examine our frail, flawed soul and, with Jesus, enter the darkness of our sin and death and journey with Him to the Cross. May we be crucified with Christ, and buried in the likeness of His death, so that when we hear the words “He is risen!” perhaps for the first time, we might truly celebrate the resurrection—because we have chosen to die so that we may have life.

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Where have you seen God today?

I’ve been thinking about Mr. Elliot, my high school biology teacher, God rest his soul. I say that knowing that he’s most certainly dead; but even when I first met him about 55 years ago he looked as though his soul could use some rest: sunken eyes with dark circles, a nervous tick, perpetually dry mouth, an air of anxiety, a tendency to startle at loud noises. The rumor around school was that he had been on the Bataan Death March in WWII. But the more relevant fact was that he happened to be the Driver’s Ed instructor.

I’ve heard it said that near death experiences will deepen a person’s spirituality. So I suppose Mr. Elliot will probably return as the next Dali Lama: I’m sure he had an awful lot of near-death experiences, apart from his wartime experiences; in fact, I shared a couple with him. I was not a great student driver, but at least my uncertainty came out as timidity. If I was going to be unsafe at any speed, 13 miles an hour seemed about right to me, scraping the curb with emergency lights

flashing. But my driving partner, who shall remain nameless due to a merciful case of selective amnesia (*thank you, Jesus!*) had only one instinct, and that was to stomp on the gas pedal. When in doubt, air it out. By now she’s either dead or she’s the little old lady from Pasadena.

Our Driver’s Ed-mobile was equipped with an instructor’s brake pedal on the passenger side, and poor old Mr. Elliot wore it out. His right leg had to be twice as big as his left leg from riding that life-saving device. The smell was awful and the car needed a brake job every 2-3 weeks; but I’m here telling you about it, so I have no complaints. What the Driver’s Ed-mobile did *not* have was rear seat seatbelts, which left the non-driver to hang loose back there, to be on your own like a rolling stone. I took to assuming a prenatal position on the back seat as we lurched toward street signs, lamp posts and parked cars. Lord, have mercy....

Through it all there was a continual barking of staccato commands from Mr. Elliot: *“Check your mirrors... aim high... signal, SIGNAL, check your mirrors, check your blind spot, BLIND SPOT, BLIND SPOT, brake, brake, brake!!”* Sometimes in my mind’s ear I can still hear him, God rest his soul, particularly when I’m thinking about blind spots. What you don’t see can kill you (*and your Driver’s Ed instructor*). And there’s always more going on out there than meets the eye....

Where have you seen God today?

How about the light streaming through the stained glass windows that can lift our spirits.... Or, maybe the faces of our children that remind us we’re all children of God....

Where have you seen God today?

When did your spirit sing, your heart ache, and laughter well up within you and overflow in a joyous outburst that let you know you’re alive? Did you find yourself wanting to dance? Did life take your breath away for a moment? Did you thrill at beauty..., or despair of the world’s incomprehensible, hate and self-inflicted blindness? Did a voice within you say, *“Somebody should do something about that?”* and another voice respond, *“You are somebody!”*? Did something within you simply make you want to give thanks for the gift of life?

Then you’ve seen God today!

And if you don’t think you have, for God’s sake, and for your own, check your blind spot. What you don’t see can kill you... or at least it can keep you from ever living, which may be worse.

Godspeed! Gary

WOMENS FELLOWSHIP NEWS

With Doris being out of commission, as editor of the Mustard Seed during December and January, our news was left out of the paper so here is a summary of the past few months activities and events that will be coming up over the next three months.

The Turkey dinner on November 15, 2014 was a success. We served 79 people and made over \$1000.00. Thanks to everyone for their generous donations, help, food, baked goods, and wonderful desserts. The cleaning, set-up, cooking, and serving are all hard work. We are grateful for your time and energy.

The December 2014 meeting was held on the 9th, and health kits for Grand Junction Rescue Mission were made of from the donations of soaps, shampoo, razors, and wash clothes. Thank you to everyone for donations for this mission.

Christmas cards were sent out to our friends and neighbors who are shut-ins.

Election of officers took place in January, 2015. Officers are as follows: President, Nancy Karlson, Vice President, Clara Ward, Secretary/Treasurer, Julia Cox.

Our group report was assembled for the Annual Meeting January, 25, 2015. Womens Fellowship provided the main course at the Annual Meeting pot luck dinner.

March meeting will be Tuesday, March 10th, at 10AM.

April 16, 2015, we are invited to attend the Women in Prayer luncheon in Grand Junction at First Congregational Church, UCC. We will be providing entertainment.

May 5, 2015 4:15pm will be the Senior Tea.

We do not meet during the summer months.

COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

March Birthdays

Case	Jim
Currier	George
Currier	Nancy
Currier	Sarah
Hamm	Debbie
Hess	Dick
Hill	Stacy
Kees	Jean
Rollins	Michelle
Spangler	Sylvia
Weimer	Judy
Wheeler	Linda
Dean	Kamile

WE HAVE NO RECORDS OF MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

Please update your Family information on the following form. Mail to :
Collbran Congregational Church UCC
P.O. Box 160, Collbran, CO,81624
Submit to Doris Achenbach at church,
or view our church website and email your information to the Mustard Seed.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TOWN STATE ZIP _____

EMAIL ADDRESS

BIRTHDAY, MONTH ONLY _____

ANNIVERSARY, MONTH ONLY _____

FAVORITE RECIPE

ROSIE CROOKS

RICH CRANBERRY COFFEE CAKE

1 8 OZ PKG SOFTENED CREAM CHEESE
1 C BUTTER
1 ½ C SUGAR
1 ½ TSP VANILLA
4 EGGS
2 ¼ C FLOUR
1 ½ TSP BAKING POWERD
2 CUP FRESH CRANBERRIES
½ CUP CHOPPED WALNUTS OR PECANS

MIX CHEESE, BUTTER, SUGAR AND VANILLA UNTIL SMOOTH. ADD EACH EGG ONE AT A TIME, MIXING WELL BETWEEN EACH EGG.

BLEND FLOUR AND BAKING POWDER AND ADD GRADUALLY INTO MIXTURE. FOLD IN CRANBERRIES AND NUTS.

BAKE IN A BUNDT PAN AT 350 FOR 55-70 MINUTES OR UNTIL TOOTHPICK COMES OUT OF CENTER OF CAKE CLEAN WHEN TESTED. LET STAND 5 MINUTES BEFORE TURNING OUT OF PAN. COOL AND DRIZZLE WHITE GLAZE OVER CAKE.

THANKS FOR THE RECIPE, ROSIE. ANYONE ELSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO SHARE A FAVORITE RECIPE IS ASKED TO SUBMIT IT TO DORIS ACHENBACH.

Thank you to the church families and the community for their support of the VBS, Sunday School, Youth Program Fundraiser.

We hope you enjoyed the Lasagna and the good visit with friends and family.

You make our missions possible.

THANK YOU!!

Sue Bellotti

Christian Ed Director

THE MUSTARD SEED

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
COLLBRAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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MARCH 2015

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