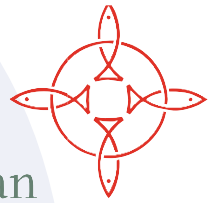


VOICE

March | 2010

Fifth Avenue
Presbyterian
Church



WHAT FAMILIES CAN DO TOGETHER IN THE SEASON OF LENT

By Jacob Bolton

As the church journeys through Lent, many people want to observe the season as a family. People have traditionally been told to give something up during Lent, which is fabulous and encouraged, however there are many other ways the liturgical season can be observed. Below are numerous ideas families can use to experience Lent together.

DISCUSS LENT AS A FAMILY

Lent is the season in which we reflect, confess and prepare for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Morning. Many church holidays take place during Lent, which starts on Ash Wednesday and includes, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Each of these holidays is observed for their own unique qualities yet they all focus on the Lenten themes of reflection, confession and preparation. Purposefully use this season as a time to reflect together as a family. Ask each other intentional questions about faith and be prepared to answer the questions you are asked in return. Discuss confession and what it means to be truly sorry. The church is preparing for Easter, talk about the resurrection and the promise of faith in Christ.

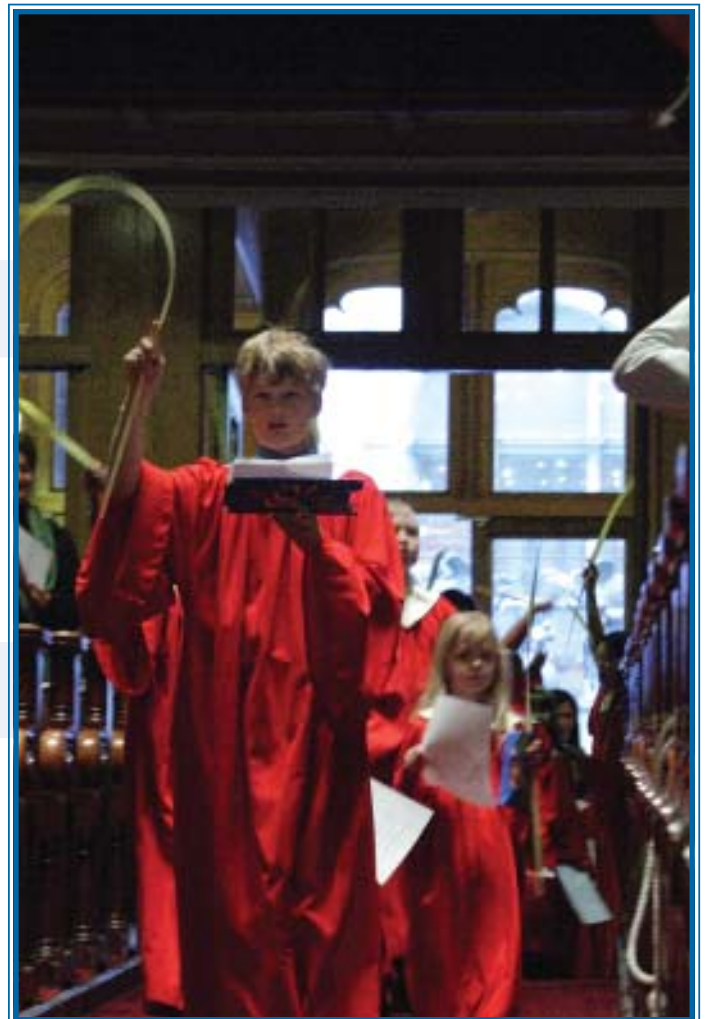
Know the church will be touching on Lenten themes throughout the entire season. Sunday School, Children's Church, Children's Choir and Youth Group will be concentrating on different aspects of the Lenten story every Sunday. The Children's Choir is singing the hymn "I Danced in the Morning" during worship on Palm Sunday and has been practicing since January. This hymn covers much of the life of Christ and the tune is simple to pick up. If your family likes to sing, sing this hymn together. Perhaps sing it as a grace instead of a usual meal time prayer during Lent or sing this before bedtime. There are a few families I know who sing together on the train on the way to school in the morning. Find the time, whenever that may be, and make it work for your family.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

One fun church tradition during Lent is the One Great Hour of Sharing fish banks. Families receive a small cardboard fish "piggy bank" from the church, put money in it during Lent and then return the banks on Palm Sunday during the processional at 11:00 am worship.

All of the money raised goes to Presbyterian humanitarian efforts around the world. Think of creative reasons for your family to put money in the banks. Maybe have everyone empty their pockets every night during the week and the spare change goes in the bank. You could also be intentional about the giving and follow the Lenten devotional the church has provided and place a quarter in the bank every day while you follow it together.

If someone in your family decided to give something up during Lent, estimate how much money that is saving the family and place the saved money in the bank as well. Discover the method that works best for you and stick with it the entire season.



HOT CROSS BUNS

My favorite Lenten tradition is eating hot cross buns. Hot cross buns are a type of sweet bun, made with currants or raisins that have an icing cross (symbolizing Christ) on top of each bun. Historically, hot cross buns were made and eaten on Good Friday, but I like to enjoy them the entire season of Lent. Baking as a family is a great time and I suggest making hot cross buns together. You can find many recipe's online, but I recommend Bette Crocker's. If you need the recipe, just ask me for it and I can send it along.

No matter what you decide I encourage each of you to intentionally experience the season of Lent as a family. You do not have to follow any of these suggestions, but hopefully they have given you an idea of other ways to journey together as a family. Lent is the season in which we remember the humanity of our Savior and the promise of Jesus. Prepare yourselves together for Christ's triumphant return on Easter.

FOUND AT THE FEAST: A SERMON ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

By The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston



Delivered on October 4, 2009 based on Scriptures Isaiah 25:4-9 and Mark 6:30-44.

In seminary, one of my professors was notorious for a writing assignment in his theology class. To begin, he would pass a fishbowl full of newspaper clippings around the classroom. Each student would reach into the bowl and pull out a clipping that had a word or a phrase highlighted on it. The student was to write a paper tracing the use of that word, that phrase, that topic throughout the entire Bible. When I reached in, I pulled out "sexuality." A friend of mine pulled out, "food." Now, at first, he was pretty happy with his pick, and he laughed at mine. Next to "sexuality," "food" seemed like (if you'll excuse the expression) a piece of cake.

He soon changed his mind. "Food" is a major subject in the Bible. Hardly a chapter goes by when there is not some mention of people who are feasting, fasting, bringing

food to the temple, storing up food for tough times, or trying to find provisions in the wilderness. My friend also discovered that biblical discussions about food can get fairly heated. In the Bible, people argue over questions like: What foods are people permitted to eat? What is kosher? What is our responsibility toward those who have no food? Who should we invite to table fellowship? Who belongs at the feast?

After a week of research, I found my friend wedged in a library carol surrounded by reference books. He groaned. "This assignment is a nightmare. In the Bible, food is everywhere. From Adam and Eve, to Martha and Mary, these people are either eating or they are talking about eating." He was frustrated, but he was also right. Heck, in the Bible, even God likes to talk about food. Take today's Old Testament text. In it, the prophet Isaiah describes a scene of delectable righteousness. Grabbing a knife and handful of carrots, God steps into heaven's kitchen and says, "I am going to prepare a feast for all people."

"When the needy cup their hands for a crust of bread, when the cries of displaced peoples rasp like sand in the desert, on that day," says God, "I will set a glorious table. I will grab the best bottles of wine from my cellar and the thickest, bone-on Rib Eyes from the meat locker, and we will feast. Everybody's invited; everybody accepts for the shrouded one." "I will stop Death at the door," promises God. "I will tell him that he can pack up his sickle and go home. His services are no longer needed. And then, I will take the corner of my apron and dab the tears from your eyes." "At that moment," says Isaiah, "the people will rejoice."

I love the prophet's imagery. God in the kitchen. Death sent packing. Food for all. I wonder if the disciples had this scene in mind when they were faced with five thousand hungry people ("sheep without a shepherd," the gospel says) on a hillside in Galilee.

*"I am going to
prepare a feast
for all people."*

Did they remember God promises to get busy in the kitchen? It doesn't look that way. Their first instinct is to complain. "These people are hungry." The Messiah shrugs in response, "You give them something to eat." The disciples fire back. "Come on, Jesus, this is Crowd Management 101. It's great when a bunch of people show up for your impromptu preach-ins, but when supertime rolls around, we have got to send them home. What other choice do we have? Our only assets are five Kaiser rolls and a couple of smoked trout."

As they cite the facts, Jesus motions the people to sit down on the verdant hillside. He blesses the

It was made, I think, of yellow pine planks (knots and all). To my five-year old eyes, it seemed massive. It was a great plateau, and as the sun went down, a city would spring up there—breadbasket spires, sweet potato stadiums, and low-slung apple pie parks. My grandmother was a sparky redhead from the Catskills whose substantial biceps were not sculpted in any gym. She was also a pre-Atkins Diet cook. I'm certain that (on any given evening) there must have been at least ten forms of carbs on her table. And why not? They were plentiful on the farm, and the men and women around that table had no problem burning them off.

*It was a great plateau, and as the sun went down,
a city would spring up there—breadbasket spires, sweet potato
stadiums, and low-slung apple pie parks.*

loaves and starts the plate of trout going around. Somebody in crowd pulls out a guitar and begins to sing, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures." The people stare at the green grass (where they are, in fact, lying) and at the twelve baskets of leftovers, and they rejoice. Mark writes that, "All ate and were filled."

Is it any wonder that Christians see eating together as a holy thing? It's who we are, and it's where God meets us. Here at FAPC, food is part of our communal gatherings, our mission, and even our worship. We have fellowship dinners, deliver meals on heels, and take donuts to the homeless guests on our steps. Once a month, we set a table here in the sanctuary and share together in the Lord's Supper. We remind each other that on the night before his arrest, Jesus dined with his friends. At that table, they did what we so often do. They poured glasses of wine, they passed dishes of food, and they talked. They talked about their fears and their hopes. They talked about life, and death, and the promises of God above.

My maternal grandparents were farmers. Their land lay across the Hudson River from here in northeastern New Jersey—Old Tappan. Their home was an old Dutch building, the cornerstone of which had been laid in the 1600's. It had stone walls, a roofline that made it look like a barn, and creaky floorboards.

The farm is no longer there. Eighteen fairways and a clubhouse have replaced the fields. Although, when I was a little boy, it was still an active operation. Six days a week, my grandfather, Charles, would drive a truck full of tomatoes and beets, string beans and greens into Manhattan. Every evening, he would return home to a dinner served by my Grandmother at the kitchen table. I loved that table.

To my five-year-old eyes, there were an awful lot of faces around that table: praying, eating, laughing, telling stories. Adults and children. Men and Women. Close kin and distant connections, if they were blood relatives to begin with. I am not sure that Aunt Anna, who would clank to the table with crutches under her arms and braces on her legs, was really an Aunt at all. Then there was Bobby—a bald, sinewy, quiet fellow, whose strong hands made me wince when he would squeeze my shoulder. My grandfather brought Bobby home with him from Manhattan one day, saying only that he had "found him there." Before long, everyone around that table called him, "Cousin Bobby."

In today's text from Isaiah, God says not once, not twice, but five times, that the feast being prepared (and the salvation being offered) is for all people—for everybody except for "the ruthless." It is a generous invitation, until it gets acted out. Years later, this same "Y'all Come" approach to dinner parties would get Jesus of Nazareth in trouble. Religious leaders of that time found his guest lists to be unseemly—uncouth. "He eats," they complained, "with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. Some holy man. He hangs out with undesirable people in ordinary circumstances."

Occasionally, I am asked to speak to a youth group about the sacraments. Pastor, can you come and explain the Lord's Supper to the confirmands? While doing this, I ask the group what they like and dislike about the sacrament. There are the usual jokes and complaints about the tiny shot glasses of juice, the staleness of the bread, and the stiffness of the ushers. Once, however, a young woman responded, "I love the fact that it is so ordinary." Her comment seemed to baffle her peers, but I liked it.

In an essay on the sacraments, Roman Catholic short story writer, Andre Dubus, states that he believes that the sacraments are signs of God's grace. He goes on to say, though, that because he participates in communion and other sacraments, his eyes have been opened to the fact that everyday life actually has thousands of sacraments. The sunshine that peaks over the horizon in the early morning is a sacrament—a gift from God. The telephone call from an old friend is a sacrament. Touching the hand of someone you love. Even a ham sandwich, says Dubus, can be a sacrament.

“On Tuesdays,” he writes, “when I make lunches for my girls I focus on this: the sandwiches are sacraments. Not the miracle of transubstantiation, but moving in the same direction. Each motion is a sacrament, this holding of knives, of bread, this spreading of mustard, this trimming of ham. I drive on the highway to their school, and this is not simply a transition: it is my love moving by car; even if I do not feel or acknowledge it, this is a sacrament.”

This morning, we are serving communion in a new way. The juice and the bread are following each other more closely. We have been practicing how to do this for a few weeks now; dear Brenda McCoy has made maps, and drilled us on our roles. I deeply appreciate the care with which our officers approach communion detail. One of them told me that his worst nightmare would be to drop one of the trays. I understand that feeling, that sense of honor for this moment, but I also wonder if God is less concerned about sacred order, and more interested the everyday, beautifully ordinary nature of what we will do here this morning.

Maybe the purpose of having a meal together in worship—a meal made up of a scrap of bread and a swallow of juice—is not to see this moment as one of those scarce times that God actually encounters us in life. Maybe the purpose, as reflected in Jesus' own words, is to enable us to see him in the most common places imaginable. In ham sandwiches. In donuts on the steps. In office cafeterias.

My friend, Rodger Nishioka, tells the story of a congregation in Washington State where they plug in bread machines on the Saturday night before every communion Sunday. Walking in the door the next morning, an incredible aroma greets worshippers, and yes, freshly baked bread adorns the Lord's Table. Rodger complimented the pastor on the aesthetics of her communion service, and she smiled. “Yes,” she said, “It's good bread. But there's more to our baking than an appreciation for fresh loaves. We want the young people in this church to associate the smell of fresh bread with communion. So that later in life, wherever they may be, in this country or some far-off place, at an open market, or a café, or a tortilla stand, wherever they may be... when they smell fresh bread, we want them to remember this table. We want them to recall the One who said, “When you do this, whenever you do this--eating bread, drinking wine, remember me.”

May the scraps of this table remind us that God is in the kitchen, calling us all to come to the feast. Let us stand together and affirm our faith, using the words of the Brief Statement of Faith found printed in your bulletins...



The youth group helped fight hunger by collecting almost \$4,000 for the Souper Bowl of Caring. (Emily Systma photo)



FAPC members conducted a survey of religious attitudes on Fifth Avenue as part of a project led by the Rev. Paul Rock. (Christine Marie Brown photo)

DEVELOPMENT

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS PLEDGING IN 2010

We have received \$1,987,010 in pledges for 2010 from 608 families to date. We will need \$313,090 more in pledges to meet our \$2.3 million goal. To help us meet our goal, please either mail your pledge card to the church office or fill out an online pledge card at www.fapc.org.

1,987,010

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You may find additional church news and feature stories on our Website, www.fapc.org.
Contributors: John Crane, Katherine Lau, and Michael Coniaris.

Submissions for the April issue should be emailed to Michael Coniaris, director of communications, at mconiaris@fapc.org no later than April. 15.

MARCH 2009

*"Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."
(Romans 12:12-13)*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Crafts Group 10:30 am	2 Pryaer Group 11:00 am WA Luncheon 12:00 pm Speaking English 1:00 pm WA Bridge 1:30 pm Congregational Dinner 5:30 pm Employment Advisory 6:30 pm	3 UP@ 7 (Bible Study/Small Group 7:00 am Lenten Service 12:30 pm	4	5	6 Meals on Heels 9:00 am
7 Worship - The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, preaching 9:30 am & 11:00 am The Theology and Practice of Celtic Spirituality 9:30 am New Members Class (Session I) 12:15 pm Depression: The Hidden Disease Revealed 12:30 pm Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Movie "Keplihan" 12:30 pm	8 Crafts Group 10:30 am	9 Pryaer Group 11:00 am WA Luncheon 12:00 pm Speaking English 1:00 pm WA Bridge 1:30 pm Creative Writing 4:00 pm Congregational Dinner 5:30 pm Ballroom Dancing 6:30 pm	10 UP@ 7 (Bible Study/Small Group 7:00 am Lenten Service 12:30 pm	11	12	13 Meals on Heels 9:00 am Youth Group Overnight 8:00 pm
14 Worship - The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston 9:30 am & 11:00 am Faith Development 9:30 am Depression: The Hidden Disease Revealed 12:30 pm Stories of Hopelessness and Hope 12:30	15 Crafts Group 10:30 am	16 Crafts Group 11:00 am WA Luncheon 12:00 pm Speaking English 1:00 pm WA Bridge 1:30 pm Congregational Dinner 5:30 pm	17 Lenten Service 12:30 pm Qur'an 12:30 pm	18	19	20 Meals on Heels 9:00 am
21 Worship The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, preaching 9:30 am & 11:00 am	22 Crafts Group 10:30 am	23 Pryaer Group 11:00 am WA Luncheon 2:00 pm Speaking English 1:00 pm WA Bridge 1:00 pm Creative Writing 4:00 pm Congregational Dinner 5:30 pm	24 UP@ 7 (Bible Study/Small Group 7:00 am Lenten Service 12:30 pm Qur'an 12:30 pm	25	26	27 Meals on Heel 9:00 am New York Choral Festival Concert 2:00 pm
28 Palm Sunday Pancake Breakfast 8:00am Worship - The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, preaching 9:30 am & 11:00 am Seder 12:30 pm Focus of Next 12:30 pm	29 Crafts Group 10:00 am	30 Pryaer Group 11:00 am WA Luncheon 12:00 pm Speaking English 1:00 pm WA Bridge 1:00 pm Congregational Dinner 5:30 pm	31 UP@ 7 (Bible Study/Small Group 7:00 am Qur'an 12:30 pm			