

**Year ABC: Ash Wedb Joel 2:1-2,12-17; Ps 103; 2Cor:5:20b-6:16-21; Mt 6:1-6,16-21  
St. Barnabas, Florissant – February 26, 2020**

**Focus Sentence:** Repentance always involves “turning” and “mind-changing”.

**I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

And so, we begin another Lent, another season of fasting, sacrifice, and repentance.

If you’ve been paying attention to our readings for Ash Wednesday, you might have noticed some contradictions in the Scripture appointed for this solemn day, or between the Scripture lessons and our liturgy for today.

In our Old Testament reading, for example, Joel twice proclaims, “Blow the trumpet in Zion.” But then, in our Gospel reading, Jesus specifically tells us, “...do not sound the trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do... .”

Jesus also tells us that, when we give alms, we shouldn’t let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. And yet, when we give our offerings here in church, we do it in a pretty public sort of way.

Again, Jesus tells us to do our praying in secret, in the privacy of our rooms; yet, our liturgy involves very public praying that is certainly meant to be seen by others.

Finally, of course, and maybe the most strange contradiction of all, is Jesus’ command not to disfigure our faces when we fast, so others don’t know that we’re fasting. Yet, in just a few minutes, we will smear ashes on our foreheads and our faces will certainly be disfigured.

So what’s going on here?

**PAUSE**

I believe that there might be a healthy tension in these contradictions. After all, we do need signs --- trumpets, special prayers, ashes --- for ourselves and for others, to be reminders of what we begin today, and for mutual support. But we need to always remember that in the end, Lent is between you and God, in the secret places of your heart.

The JOB of Lent is definitely what the church calls REPENTANCE. In the Old Testament, the relationship between the people and God is usually described as a walk, a journey, most especially that defining journey of the Israelites out of Egypt and into the promised land. But over the course of their walk with God, the Israelites frequently strayed and lost their way, their focus. And so, the prophets had to continually remind them to repent. The Hebrew word which we translate as repent is “shuv,” which means to turn. “Turn back” to God, “turn away” from your wandering. Get back on the right path. And this job is best done in the secrecy of our hearts.

In the New Testament, written in Greek, the word translated as repentance is METANOIA, or meta/change – noia/thinking. Here, the emphasis is on our thinking; we get our thinking out of kilter, and we need to change it back to a focus on God’s plan for us.

In either case, whether you want to see Lent as an opportunity to get your footsteps back on the right path, the walk with God (and, by the way, one of my favorite hymns is one called *Order my Steps*), or whether you want to see Lent as a time to refocus your mind, your thinking on God, we have forty days in which to do it: forty precious days to reflect, to pray, to get the job done.

That’s a wonderful gift, my sisters and brothers. So, beginning today on Ash Wednesday, may you experience a worthwhile and a holy Lent!

**AMEN**