

As a trinitarian Christian, I'm used to thinking in threes:

Father, Son, Holy Spirit

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Peter, James, and John

Scripture, tradition, and reason

The pattern must be ingrained because as I thought about Ash Wednesday I saw a triptych of sorts. The season we've left - Christmas/Epiphany - a time to be introduced to Jesus, to become familiar with his ideals, and meet his chosen friends. The season to come - Easter - experiencing the risen Christ and culminating with the sending of the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost. In the middle of these comes Lent: a purple, penitential center between golden celebrations.

Lenten disciplines also can be thought of in a triad. Something for God, something for others, something for me. I know that this is a little out of the box, given that we are usually giving up or taking on during the season, but perhaps it's time to try something new.

Something for God could be trying a new prayer practice, or reading a devotional everyday, or discovering a new saints' biography to read.

Something for others might be a paper lunch bag in the middle of the table and each person puts 2 cents in the bag each meal. At the end of Lent, give the money in the bag to a ministry with homeless or hungry folks.

Something for others means that if you do give up something, you take the money you would have spent and buy extra food for the Manna Food Pantry.

Something for yourself. Betcha didn't see this one coming. We're supposed to be so pious and sacrificial season. I'm not advocating for an extra spa day or a new car. Those go in the 'giving-up' section - see above!

I'm advocating for Sabbath.

To keep the Sabbath is the most ignored and violated commandment of the ten. (Sorry, adultery, you come in second.) When it comes to our spiritual health and wellbeing, it is probably the most important.

Sabbath gives us time to rest in God's care. It's a time set aside to honor God and the people who are important to you.

Sabbath is a time to give up! It's a time to give up worry. It's a time to give up practices that dishonor the dignity of human beings. It's a time to give up the world for a while and let God be God. As I reflect on this it occurs to me that "heaven" may simply be eternal Sabbath!

Sabbath is a time to take on! We can take on the primacy of relationships. Heal those that are torn, nurture those that are strong, create those that seem promising. We can take on holy naps to restore our bodies and spirits.

Sabbath for so many of us is something new. Some of us don't like the idea of purposely doing nothing, to not be busy, to not be producing. Yet it is only in those times where we have set activity aside that we can clear our minds and imaginations long enough to let God's Spirit settle upon us.

I've spoken to many parishioners, friends, and colleagues over the last several months. All are expressing feelings of angst, despair, fear, and foreboding regarding the state of the world, the state of the country, and the state of their souls. I understand. My Facebook feed churns over anger and hatred with every hour. My e-mails contain more bad news, and all with solicitations for me to sign petitions AND make donations.

I understand that I need to be informed. I also understand that I need to be sane. That's where Sabbath's value becomes clear. I am not God. I do not have the universe under my care. I do not have to take the universe under my wing. Father/Mother has done that. I cannot have to save the world. Christ, by his death, resurrection and ascension, has done that. I am not responsible for moving hearts and minds toward justice, that is the Spirit's duty. On the Sabbath, God invites us to be us and asks us to allow God to be God. This doesn't mean that we don't have work to do the other days of the week! It means that we need to rest to discern what we are called to do and what we are not called to do.

I bid you this Lent to take time for Sabbath. Take time to assess what your passions are and how you best serve God within those passions. If we bleed for all causes, we eventually run out of blood! If we grieve for everything that is going wrong, we forget to live for all the things that are beautiful. If we try to be God, we miss experiencing God.

At the end of Shabbat our Jewish friends say a prayer to dedicate themselves to their relationship with God. I commend it to you this Lent. It says:

*Behold, God is my help; trusting in the Eternal One, I am not afraid. For the Eternal One is my strength and my song, and has become my salvation.*

*With joy we draw water from the wells of salvation. The Eternal One brings deliverance and blessing to the people. The God of the hosts of heaven is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. God of the hosts of heaven, happy is the one who trusts in You! Save us, Eternal One; answer us, when we call upon You. Give us light and joy, gladness and honor, as in*

*the happiest days of our people's past. Then shall we lift up the cup to rejoice in Your saving power, and call out Your name in praise.*

Take every opportunity to make Sabbath moments within your days and Sabbath days within your weeks this purple and penitential season. May you find that Sabbath provides something for God, something for others, something for yourself. Amen.