

Worship Associate Reflection - March 3, 2019

By Bruce Langston

I used to say I was “raised Catholic.” In fact, I was raised in a Catholic family. I don’t think I was ever a Catholic. Lent is one of those religious concepts that didn’t make any sense to me. If only I had known at the time, that I do better with things that make sense, I wouldn’t have struggled so much with religion.

What is Lent? It’s 40 days of preparation for Easter with prayer, repentance and self-denial . It starts the day after Fat Tuesday (Mardi Gras!), on Ash Wednesday. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full Moon after the first day of Spring. Why do I remember this? Not because I was good little Catholic boy, but because I liked the scientific connection to the lunar cycle and the four seasons, and the fact the church at the council of Nicea in when was that, Reverend Dave? 325 CE? Thank you. And what was the council of Nicaea? It was a organizing meeting of the Catholic Church. What did they decide? “Jesus is God...” and “We need some holidays!” They picked two:

- Christmas, Jesus’s birthday, even though Jesus was born, according to biblical accounts, as far as scholars can tell, in the spring, which would be on the existing Pagan Holiday, the Winter Solstice.
- The second Holiday? Easter! A celebration of Jesus’s supposed resurrection. When? Near the first day of spring. Specifically the first Sunday after the first full moon after the first day of spring. And Lent starts 40 days before on, anyone? Ash Wednesday.

During the season of Lent, Catholics over the age of 14 are required to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent . Catholics over the age of 18 are required to also fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. ... Some Catholics fast each evening or perhaps every Friday of Lent.

Thinking about Rev Dave’s topic for today, I Googled. I mean, I went to the library and researched, the “shadow self.” I saw some references to Parker Palmer, whose philosophy and work Cynthia Prescott introduced me to.

I found a podcast, [an episode of the reboot podcast at reboot.io](http://reboot.io) (episode#14 – Shadow and Leadership), with Jerry Colonna, who is one of the regular hosts, I take it, and Parker Palmer. Listening to these two guys talk is beautiful. They discuss different things people do to deal with struggle and uncertainty. And many people figuratively run away from themselves. People avoid self-examination. They can't open up in relationships and reveal themselves. Why? Because they can't open up to themselves. They're running away from themselves. Anyway, I have only five minutes, but obviously, no matter how far you run, yourself is still there waiting to be acknowledged, examined and shared. I found that when I stopped running and examined and acknowledged me, I was a little more comfortable with me. And UUMAN helped.

It took me a long time to figure out what Lent is supposed to be about. If only they had stated that Lent was a time for self-examination instead of self-denial, it might have made a little more sense to me.

On Wednesday, I got a "Brain Pickings" email from Maria Popova. (They come two-a-week. I don't always read them, but when I do, I find they're gold!) The email subject was "Nietzsche on how to find yourself and the true value of education." Hold on to Nietzsche for a second. In the email Popova first quotes Elizabeth Gilbert, "Do you have the courage to bring forth the treasures that are hidden within you?"

After this question from Gilbert, Popova goes on "This is among life's most abiding questions and the history of human creativity — our art and our poetry and most empathically all of our philosophy — is the history of attempts to answer it."

Back to Nietzsche, from the book, *The Will to Power*, published by Nietzsche's sister after his death, from his writings, "To those human beings who are of any concern to me, I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities — I wish that they should not remain unfamiliar with profound self-contempt, the torture of self-mistrust, the wretchedness of the vanquished: I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing that can prove today whether one is worth anything or not — that one endures." And how do we endure? By toughening up. By experiencing difficulty, darkness and examining the shadow we cast.

But did Nietzsche will only trouble for his friends? No. As proof, another quote from Maria Popova's Wednesday email, from *The Will to Power*: "What if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever wanted to have as much as possible of one must also have as much as possible of the other — that whoever wanted to learn to "jubilate up to the heavens" would also have to be prepared for "depression unto death"?"

You have the choice: either as little displeasure as possible, painlessness in brief ... or as much displeasure as possible as the price for the growth of an abundance of subtle pleasures and joys that have rarely been relished yet. If you decide for the former and desire to diminish and lower the level of human pain, you also have to diminish and lower the level of their capacity for joy.