

A Lenten Meditation by The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller, Bishop of Milwaukee

“Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful....”

Joel 2:12-13a NRSV

Dear Friends in Christ,

On Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, we begin the holy season of Lent, a time of prayer, fasting, and self-denial in preparation for Easter. Over my years in ordained ministry I have written a number of articles for parish and diocesan publications inviting those in my pastoral care to observe a holy Lent. These articles have urged the faithful to take on a spiritual discipline rather than see Lent as a season of giving up or invited folks to participate in Lenten programming. While these are good things, I want to invite us this year to go deeper.

We hear the prophet Joel invite us to rend our hearts and not our garments on Ash Wednesday. When we do that what do we see? I suspect that if we are honest with ourselves we see that even before this tearing there was much brokenness within. We see the scars left by our own failings, the brokenness of others, and the culture in which we live. If you are at all like me I suspect you see your own selfishness, your participation in unjust structures of society, and your denial of the truth not only about yourself and your relationship with those you love but the world in which we live. But as we rend our hearts, we see also the possibility of healing. A heart must be broken before it can be healed, just as a surgeon must open the body before it can be repaired.

Of late, I have become increasingly aware that if Lent is to mean anything it must mean surrender to grace as the operative in our life rather than our will -- Letting go and inviting God in Christ through the Spirit to enter deeply and receive the grace to be formed and molded by God, and God alone, rather than our images of God that are often less than God and frequently are idols. (I have often said the entire library which is the Bible, is a conversation and call to reject idolatry in all of its forms.)

What idols is God inviting you to set aside this Lent? What might you be worshipping that is less than God? Are we so busy trying to save ourselves that there is no room for the Savior?

These are the questions I am asking this Lent. Will you join me?

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "S. A. Miller".

+Steven