



Reflections for the Journey

SAINT JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH • ELLICOTT CITY, MD

Spiritual Practices for Lent That Boost Resiliency

By: *The Rev. Ann Ritonia, Rector*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Ash Wednesday, the season of Lent begins. In my prayer and reading, I am once again reminded of the wisdom of the spiritual practices of this season in light of the increased lack of resiliency and polarization within our culture. Resiliency skills, such as **self-awareness, attention and flexibility, stability of focus, letting go physically and mentally, and accessing and sustaining positive emotion**, when strengthened and modeled by adults, can improve our own resilience and that of our children by increasing executive function, self-regulation, and remind us we are loved and belong to a God and Savior who can save

us from ourselves. Lent, the 40 days – not counting Sundays – before Easter when we follow Jesus on his journey toward Jerusalem is a wonderful time to develop these skills through practice of the classic disciplines of Lent: self-examination and repentance, prayer, fasting and self-denial, and reading and meditation on God's Holy Word. They not only bring us closer to God by helping us develop spiritual muscles, but their practice helps us become more resilient in facing the challenges of being human in this day and age.

Stress, anxiety, and depression in our country are at levels beyond what we have experienced in the past. While stress and biology are most

certainly at work in some cases of anxiety and depression (and medical and psychological management are most appropriate), developing resiliency through our Lenten spiritual practices can reinforce the skills necessary to cope with, adapt to, and, in some cases even prevent adversity in our lives.

These spiritual practices can also remind us we are loved and belong to a God and Savior who can save us from ourselves.

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Self-examination and repentance help us to see the truth about ourselves and increase self-awareness. Lent brackets two essential facts about our existence as human beings: Ash Wednesday, where we are reminded that we are mortal – “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”; and Easter, where we are reminded that we are immortal, that death is swallowed up in victory in Jesus Christ. Both help us gain a deeper understanding of who and whose we are: both of the earth and of the Spirit.

Fasting and self-denial remind us that we are entirely dependent on God and enable us to pay attention and focus on areas of our life that may be moving us closer or farther away from our joy and greatest potential. Our very life comes from God and, by giving up something to which we are attached, (letting go both physically and mentally), we gain more

freedom and flexibility to place ourselves in God’s hands.

Almsgiving, or giving to others of time and money, especially those in need, is a way both to work on self-denial and become more connected to others. Giving, like fasting, gets us outside of ourselves and allows us to access emotions of positive regard not only for ourselves but for others.

Reading and meditating on scripture is how we learn what God is like. It provides stability and focus on the variety of ways that God can relate to us, as well as how we can relate to God. We learn about Jesus’ character. We are given visions of how human life can be full of strength, health, power, and joy. Simple ways to get started might be re-reading the Sunday readings through the following week or using a web site such as prayer.forwardmovement.org.

Prayer is how we develop our relationship with God. Prayer is where we discover God’s unconditional love and regard for us and how this love can sustain us even when

we are not feeling so lovable. Prayer helps us access and sustain positive emotions. In prayer we learn more about God, we grow closer to Jesus, and we become more open to the Holy Spirit. A simple prayer of gratitude every morning and evening has been proven to increase positive feelings that effect resiliency.

Lent is a great time to try a new prayer practice. This could be something we do every day. One could start to spend five minutes simply being silent and open to the Holy Spirit. You could join the group that meets on Tuesday evenings at 6:00 p.m. for Centering Prayer or the group that meets on Thursdays at 7:30 a.m. for prayer and Eucharist. Both groups meet in Resurrection Chapel. Not only will your focus and emotional reserves grow through prayer but your relationship with God and others will thrive as well.

Like many things in life, the more we invest in something, the more return we will get. I invite you to the observance of a holy Lent.

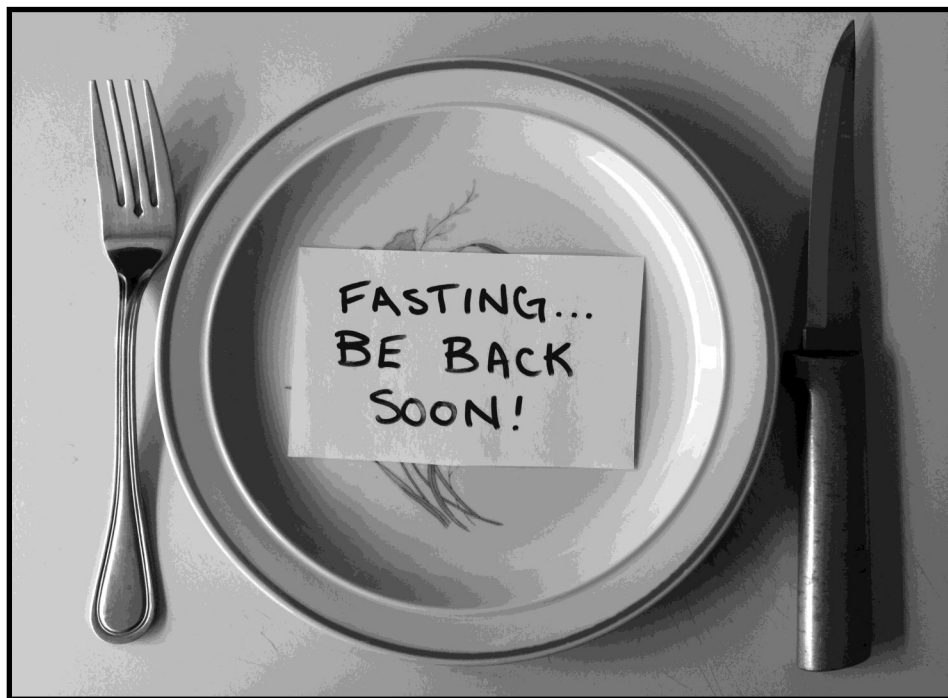
Blessings,
Rev. Ann

FASTING

By: *The Rev. Stephen Hagerty, Associate Rector for Discipleship*

My educated guess is that when you hear the word, “fast,” you think of bloodwork, or, at the very least, cholesterol levels. The one regular time I am asked to fast for 24 hours is before getting bloodwork done so my primary physician can inform me of the ways I need to eat better. It has a vaguely punitive feel to it, as in, “let’s check your bloodwork using levels closer to how you should be eating/living/exercising, versus the current reality!”

But this type of fasting bears little resemblance to the spiritual practice, which goes back to the earliest times of Christian practice. Starting about 300 years into what we now call Christianity, people started fasting before Easter, that time we have come to know as Lent. The specific scriptural reference grounding this practice was to Jesus’ fasting and temptation in the desert (e.g., Mark 1:13; Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). And it is not surprising that Jesus fasted: as he was an observant Jew, and



fasting was a common Jewish practice (and still is!). Fasting was about preparation: preparing for an encounter. Before Moses went up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, scripture attests to his fasting in preparation (see Exodus 34:28).

But I wonder if our reluctance to embrace this practice, either with food or any other activity (Facebook, television, gambling, or more serious issues like complaining and gossiping) is less about giving up something we find pleasurable,

but avoiding what we might encounter once we have given something up!

Should you consider fasting as a spiritual practice this Lent, I hope you will approach it as less about having less (or more!) but as creating a space for encounter. Who knows how God may present Him/Herself to you should you slow down and remain open to that reality that desires to simply be with us. At the very least, it will be more interesting than discovering your cholesterol levels!

Bringing Holy Lent Home

By: The Rev. Joanne Tetrault, Associate Rector of Children's Ministries & Parish Day School Chaplain

You are invited in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent, says our *Book of Common Prayer*. The Lenten season begins, of course, on Ash Wednesday, and continues for 40 days. These 40 days were traditionally the time in which converts to Christianity prepared for an Easter baptism; and, when others, who had been separated from the community, were brought back into the fold, having confessed their sins — forgiven and restored.

Today, we understand Lent to be a period of self-examination, prayer, and penitence. Yet, far from being a dreary season, Lent derives from the Anglo-Saxon word, *lencton*, which points to springtime, longer days, growth, and rebirth!

So why not bring a little bit of Lent into your home, making room to practice some quiet, reflective time during this beautiful, hopeful season. Here are a few suggestions for **creating a holy Lenten space**, adapted from *BuildingFaith.org*.*

You may choose to place several or all of these items in a central place in your home, such as the dining room table or a small table in the main living area.

Candle: A symbol of God's presence with us. You can invite God in to your holy space by saying, "We light the candle to remind us that God is with us here and now."

Purple cloth: You will see the purple cloths of Lent that are used in church (the altar hangings, and the clergy's vestments). This color symbolizes mourning (the death of Jesus) as well as royalty (Jesus's coming again as the sovereign Lord).



Empty bowl: During Lent, we fast (or more often, "give up" something like chocolate or another food we love!) so that we have more space within us to talk to God, and open

ourselves up for God to move in our lives. We are making space to receive the great mystery of Easter. If you like, encourage family members to write down something they want to fast from and place the paper in the bowl as a reminder.

Scripture, poem, or prayer: Prayer every night at mealtime can work well. Consider following the daily readings of the church (www.lectionarypage.net). The Good Shepherd of Psalm 23 is a wonderful image to meditate on with young children.

Cross: Take time to look at a cross together. Talk about Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. Notice that the shape of the cross points vertically (our relationship with God) and horizontally (our relationships with each other). These relationships are woven together in the cross.

**Building Faith is a ministry of Virginia Theological Seminary and a treasure-trove of resources, articles, and ideas for all church seasons! Check it out!*

St. John's Youth Put Their Faith in Action

By: Colleen Citrano, Director of Youth Ministries



Last month during Discovery Weekend, we had 170 youth, leaders, and drivers go out and complete Outreach Ministry as part of this year's "Celebrate Life" curriculum. While it was a lot to coordinate – finding local organizations to serve that would take our youngest 6th grade youth, recruiting drivers, requesting donations, and organizing supplies – the work was worth it to hear many say that it was their favorite part of the weekend!

We were able to support 11 local organizations with the 1,000+ items donated, which enabled us to:

- ◆ Stuff over 60 Cubby Bags (snacks and activities) for families at the Ronald McDonald House in Baltimore.

- ◆ Prepare 40 Welcome Bags and Snack Bags for the Ulman House where young adults impacted by cancer and their families find support.

- ◆ Prepared and distributed over 125 lunch bags to the homeless in Baltimore (in conjunction with the St. Francis Neighborhood Center).

- ◆ Served a hot lunch and played Bingo with Project PLASE in Baltimore and Catonsville. Our Bingo prizes were necessities such as wool socks, hand warmers, hospitality bags (shampoo, hand sanitizer, lotion), and other special treats.

- ◆ Three groups visited local nursing home and assisted living facilities where they played games and socialized with residents.

- ◆ Two groups went to local ARC homes to give them a thorough cleaning and meet the clients. It was an added surprise that one house was the recipient of our Breakfast Club's holiday basket in December!

- ◆ Another group helped those with food insecurities in our area by taking donations to Food on the 15th and setting up a temporary grocery store for residents to select items. In addition, they shopped for UMBC Retriever Essential Bags to help students at UMBC who suffer from food insecurity.

Even though many of our youth may have been out of their comfort zones initially, the experience of helping others and giving of their time was a wonderful event that will prepare our youth to continue to live out their Baptismal Covenant.

Our YAC group will continue their monthly ministries through April and our Rite-13 group will prepare and deliver packed lunches for Grassroots in March. In God, all of us are loved and I see God's love being spread by our wonderful youth!

Resilience

By: *The Rev. Dr. Katrina Grusell*
Associate Rector for Pastoral Care & UMBC Chaplain

In *The How of Happiness*, Sonja Lyubomirsky details twelve ways to increase happiness. Among them is practicing religion and spirituality, learning to forgive, nurturing relationships, and strengthening resilience by developing coping strategies.

While some people are more resilient than others, anyone can increase their resiliency at any age, which leads to a happier life. It begins by making a choice to become more self-aware. What are the triggers that increase stress in your life? Can you recognize and name the feelings associated your moods and as stress arises? Awareness of your emotional functioning enables you to make choices in how best to respond.

Increasing resiliency occurs through the practice of habits and attitude. After an unexpected or difficult life event, resilient people adapt with a fluid and flexible, manageable plan. Practicing this in daily life, by worshiping in different services, for example, increases

adaptability and resiliency, in turn. Resilient people also learn to handle uncomfortable feelings, honoring their feelings while modulating their responses and behavior—hence the need for self-awareness. Practicing gratitude, perseverance, and finding meaning in all circumstances also strengthens. Resilient people tend to savor moments, finding joy, humor, and beauty present even in hard times. Pausing in the moment then, whether experiencing a sudden, jolting event or a calm, nurturing circumstance, is important to developing the resilient self.

Resilience is never achieved alone. Close, dependable relationships are essential in navigating life's challenges. As a community of care, St. John's provides a variety of pastoral care supports for members of our congregation. Stephen Ministers are trained parishioners who provide weekly support for those in difficult transitions or chronic illness. These caring relationships can trans-



St. John's is a source of strength available to you in turbulent times.

Office: 410-461-7793

**Clergy On-Call:
443-538-2806**

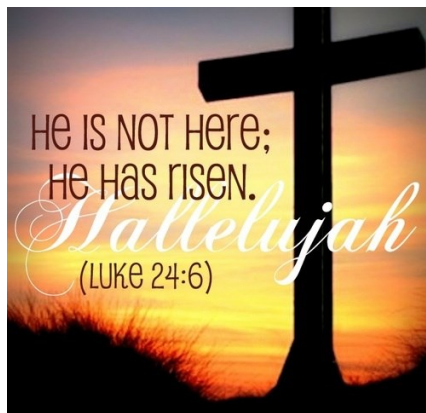
(emergencies when office is closed)

form the isolation often present in the midst of suffering. Lay Eucharistic Visitors bring communion to the sick or homebound who cannot be present at church on Sunday, connecting them to our community through prayer and sacrament. Our meals ministry and bereavement team wrap the sick and grieving in love. Walking the Mourner's Path, St. John's bereavement program, offers confidential, small group care. Of course, there are many more programs and a vast network of informal relationships and friendships at St. John's that provide support and nurture parishioners. Being

connected makes us more resilient, and as a result, happier.

In order to effectively support parishioners, the clergy of St. John's need to know when you are ill, having surgery, grieving, or struggling with life in any way. On our website you can find a list of times to call the clergy so we can provide support and connect you with resources. It is especially important to have the clergy on call number in your cell phone and near your home phone to reach the St. John's clergy when an emergency occurs and the office is closed.

St. John's is a community of care. It is a reservoir of love to draw from on our faith journey and a source of strength in turbulent times. Our bonds will be strengthened, our lives happier, and our ministry more powerful as we support and care for one another.



EASTER!

What an amazing moment it must have been to be one of the women who went down to the tomb that first Easter morning. They came expecting death and sorrow. Their messiah and friend had been killed, and now the best they could hope for was to give him a proper burial. Instead, they find an empty tomb, two angelic figures proclaiming Jesus' resurrection, and an invitation to new life. Their expectations were blown away.

This encounter with Jesus changed them so much that they were compelled to GO back to their fellow followers and proclaim the good news. Their testimony would eventually spread to every corner of the earth so that wherever we go, the love of God will meet us there.

In this journey, you have been called to engage with the mystery of death and resurrection as mirrored in the Easter Vigil. We have been called from darkness into light. From fear into joy. From sin into restoration. From death into life. Our job now is to follow the examples of those women and go into the world proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. Let this be the season that you go and live the full gift of the resurrection.

REFLECT: Easter is not just one day. It is a season of 50 days, significantly longer than the 40 days in Lent. Our Church's calendar is designed this way to help us remember that we are called to GO and live a life that is centered more on resurrection joy than on fear. During this Eastertide, find ways to live into the Way of Love you have walked this Lent.

The end of our Lent journey is only the beginning, as we take all the transformation we have experienced and imagined and use it to join God in healing and reconciling the world. How will you GO and tell the story of the empty tomb out loud? How have you been changed and how might you change others?

*From "Life Transformed: The Way of Love in Lent." Used with permission.
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HOLY WEEK & EASTER SUNDAY

EVE OF PALM SUNDAY, April 4

5:00 p.m. Blessing of the Palms & Holy Eucharist, *Gather outside of Resurrection Chapel*

PALM SUNDAY, April 5

8:00 a.m. Blessing of the Palms & Holy Eucharist, *Gather in front of the Historic Church*

10:15 a.m. Blessing of the Palms & Holy Eucharist, *Gather at the Labyrinth*

TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK, April 7

6:00 p.m. Centering Evening Prayer, *Resurrection Chapel*

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK, April 8

6:00 p.m. Dinner Church, *Resurrection Chapel*

7:00 p.m. Individual Rite of Reconciliation (also known as Confession)
(*walk-ins will be received by the Clergy through 8:30 p.m.*), *Historic Church*

MAUNDY THURSDAY, April 9

4:00 p.m. Individual Rite of Reconciliation—also known as Confession
(*walk-ins will be received by the Clergy through 5:30 p.m.*), *Historic Church*

7:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist, Foot Washing, and Stripping of the Altar, *Historic Church*

9:00 p.m. Prayer Vigil (*concludes at 10:30 p.m.*), *Resurrection Chapel*

GOOD FRIDAY, April 10

10:00 a.m. Stations of the Cross, *Lower Commons, Shiflet Center for Ministry & Education*

12:00 p.m. Good Friday Prayers and Meditations, *Historic Church (continues through 3 p.m.)*

7:30 p.m. Solemn Good Friday Service with Passion Reading and Music, *Historic Church*

HOLY SATURDAY, April 11

9:00 a.m. Holy Saturday Prayers, *Historic Church*

4:00 p.m. Easter Eve Holy Eucharist, Rite II & Holy Baptism, *Historic Church*

8:30 p.m. The Great Vigil of Easter & Holy Baptism, *Historic Church*

EASTER, April 12

8:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist, Rite II, *Historic Church*

10:15 a.m. Festival Holy Eucharist, Rite II, *Historic Church*

10:15 a.m. Celebratory Holy Eucharist, Rite II, *All Saints Hall, Shiflet Center for Ministry & Education*