

Foreword

One might think, from popular culture and some church practice, that Lent is a season in which we may variously feel sad, guilty, or deprived. But of course Lent is none of that. Lent is a season when we face the matter of being more seriously and more fully disciples of Jesus. In this season we remember that he “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). (KJV ups the ante with *steadfastly*). He resolved to go to the capitol to be on record with his alternative vision of social reality. If he had stayed in Galilee and not gone to Jerusalem, he would have remained a popular, largely unrecognized unimportant rabbi. His decision to go to Jerusalem means that he would assert and act out the contradiction that his good news posed for the political-religious establishment. Discipleship is a life of following him on the path of contradiction and contestation.

Of course it takes a life-time (not forty days!) to decide for that. But Lent is our chance to decide. And now among us it is inescapably evident that any embrace of his good news places his followers in contradiction to the dominant narrative of the political-religious establishment. Down deep I imagine that most of us preachers, like most of our parishioners, really do not want to face that reality. But Lent is when we do face that chance, even as he “set his face.” This may mean that in our rendering of Lent we critically reflect on our common Lenten practices of romanticism, piety, and spirituality to see how we may foster and face a more dangerous “following.”

This issue of the *Journal* is good news for preachers for whom Lent is a huge challenge. This issue offers a treasure of rich suggestive resources for the season. David Schlafer offers a terrific reflection on the four master narratives of the Fourth Gospel. The three studies by Rodney Hunter, Mark Ramsey, and Kristy Farber open paths for critical practical engagement with matters of contrition, anger, and grief that require careful, wise attention in our stressed society. Faithful to our Journal’s mission, we offer five sermons by Amy McCullough (homesickness), David Lose (mistrust), Jill Duffield (Galatians 5), this editor (abundance), and Meg McLaughlin (Romans 5). These several sermons make knowing connections to our specific social circumstance. Our Lent issue concludes with two of our recurring features. Douglas Hall, in “Protagonist Corner,” offers a fresh puckish take on the drama of God as a generative Parent. David Mosser finishes for us with the suggestion of a strong book on the counter-narrative of Jesus.

It is clear from this rich body of resource that Lent this time around cannot be for “business as usual.” Matters among us are much too demanding for that. Perhaps the aim of our Lenten preaching might be that at the end of Lent, by the time we come to the depth of Saturday, we will be more deeply and honestly situated in this story that we call the “passion narrative,” the account of suffering at the hands of the authorities. I have had the thought that preachers should likely not talk about “crucifixion” (now a cliché), but might speak of the “execution” whereby the authorities disposed of an unwelcome, unmanageable witness. By the same reasoning, we might talk less about the “cross” (now a sweet pious icon), but should speak of the “gas chamber” or the “electric chair,” or at least imagine what it would be like for Jesus, in his unwelcome crossing of the border from Galilee to Judea, to be “caged” by the authorities. We might alter our rhetoric to make it clear that the arrival of Jesus among the powerful,

wealthy elites was in order to contradict their claims. Such rhetoric would of course be risky among the faithful, but our situation requires a bit of a risk. Imagine that by the end of Lent we will have, in real and active ways, decided

To love more dearly,
To see more clearly, and
To follow more nearly.

It would have been safer and wiser to remain in Galilee!

Walter Brueggemann