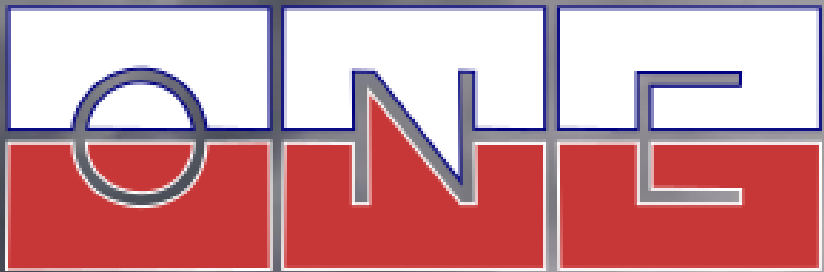


**INSIDE:**

+ **Preparing for Easter  
with Lent**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

March 2022



**40 Days of  
Prayer, Fasting,  
& Works of Love**



Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

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## **Editor's Note:**

Some individuals prepare for the Easter season by observing Lent. Others don't. We asked our writers to tell us how they prepare for this holy time of year and the challenges they face in doing so.

## ***Lent and Easter Are All About God, Not About Us***

### ***Written by:***

***Rev. Shay Craig***

The Episcopal Church will mark the beginning of Lent with an Ash Wednesday Service at 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 2, at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 2900 Canal Blvd., and ending with a Maundy Thursday Meal at 6 p.m., Thursday, April 14.

I am a person who adopts a Lenten discipline every year, and I love it. Sometimes I adopt a new habit or practice. Sometimes I abstain from something. In either case, I always arrive at Easter morning a little more aware of the sights and sounds of the service, a little more "in tune" with the subtle signs of spring in the air, and considerably more receptive to the miraculous gift of the love of God in every element of my existence and the world around me. Observing Lent

with a discipline of some kind is something I look forward to and am always glad I did.

But let me be clear: It doesn't really matter.

The 40 days of Lent remind us of other 40-day-long pivotal events in Scripture: the great flood in Genesis; the temptation of Christ in the wilderness; and the period between the resurrection and Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Each of these events begins with the recognition of the intervention of a loving God in our lives. The flood began with a pronouncement from God to end sin and suffering and to save the remnant in Noah's family. Jesus entered the desert immediately after his baptism, when God publicly spoke words of affirmation over him. The resurrection, of course, takes place after God incarnate intervenes for the

salvation of the world.

Each of these events ends with the world altered in some way: the offering of a new covenant with God in the form of a rainbow; the commencement of the ministry of the Messiah in the world; and the birth of the body of Christ, the commissioning of the Church.

Note that none of these things was the work of people. God did all that. No help from us at all.

So, if Lent commemorates those great events, and if observing Lent means honoring and re-imagining those great events in our daily lives, we should begin with that fact: It's not about us. It's about God.

The disciplines of Lent should point to God.

This year, my first Lenten discipline will be writing down,

## ***Lent and Easter Are All About God, Not About Us (Continued)***

at the end of every day, three times during the day when I felt God's presence. It might be in the sunrise, in the face of a stranger, peace in the Middle East, or in safely navigating the roundabouts all the way from El Dos de Oros to Thirsty's. I will write them down, note the loving presence of God, and be grateful. In this way, I hope my Lenten discipline will point to God's presence in the world.

My second Lenten discipline this year will be abstaining from swearing. (There are members of my congregation right now clapping their hands in joy to hear this news.) I will try to use the beautiful and bountiful vocabulary God has given us and to reserve the words that refer to God for times when I want to refer to God. In this

discipline, I hope to remind myself that God always provides a kinder, gentler, more elegant and abundant way, if I am willing to look for it.

Now, the truth about these Lenten disciplines is that I will fail. The day will come when I fall asleep on the couch before I get my three items written down. Very likely, over the course of five weeks, I will lose the list entirely for at least a few days. And I try every year to stop swearing, I have tried every possible incentive and disincentive over the years, but I am still notoriously the Potty Mouth Priest.

And yet Easter will come. The sun will rise on April 17, and our congregation will burst into song with the lyrics, "Hail thee, festival day," and the fact of God's miraculous

gift will break over us with the dawn light. Whether or not we gave up chocolate. Whether or not we learned a psalm by heart.

What matters about Lent is that it points to Easter. And the importance of Easter is that God's grace is a gift, freely given. Unearned. Undeserved. Indiscriminate. Abundant. Eternal.

Whether or not we adopt a Lenten discipline, God is always yearning to be in relationship with us, and to accept God's love is all that is ever asked of us in return.



*The Rev. Shay Craig is Vicar of St. Andrew's and St. Michael's Episcopal Churches in Hays.*

### ***A Presbyterian Intentionally Focuses on Lent***

***Written by:***  
***Becky Rogowski***

I frequently remind myself that I am not a theologian. I am not a pastor. I DO ministry. I am a God-fearing and God-loving child of God. I try my best everyday to leave the world a little better than I found it. I work on relationships day in and day out, including the relationship I have with God. I

am Presbyterian because I was born into a Presbyterian family. I know a thing or two (or more) about some of the other religions. I am by no means an "expert."

I am a Hays native and, while growing up, my numerous Catholic friends had to eat fish on Fridays and "fast" during Lent. This was my introduction to fasting and giving things up. They said

they were doing it because of all the things God gave us and because they loved God. It was honestly a pretty murky concept to me. I knew I was glad I was Presbyterian and didn't have to give up pop, chocolate, watching television, or playing video games for 40 days. I also didn't "have" to eat fish on Fridays. I was certainly clueless what made Catholics

## ***A Presbyterian Intentionally Focuses on Lent (Continued)***

so “different” from Presbyterians during Lent.

During my young adult years, I had an influential pastor address the concept of “fasting” and what it means to Presbyterians. This was a huge “whoa, wait up, hold on a minute” moment for me. I thought it meant nothing. Growing up, the only Lent-y thing my Presbyterian family did was collect coins on a daily basis for a special offering.

This pastor spent an entire sermon clearing up my whole view of Lent. He said that his belief is that our loving God wouldn’t ask us to stop enjoying the things we desire --not even a 40-day break. He said that Lent could be observed by reducing our use of things or even by taking on new good habits. This is not to be confused with New Year’s Resolutions--remember, those things we take on with good intent and then drop soon after? Those. This is different.

Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before Easter, the pinnacle of the Christian calendar. Lent is about what God has done, not about what I am doing. But this is not a piece about the history and meaning of Lent, nor Lenten theology. You can find those answers

better stated elsewhere. Let’s talk about personal Lenten practice.

Taking on a good God-honoring habit is a way I’ve found to force myself into a positive choice. As I add something positive to my plate, I often have to give up something else anyway to make time or room. Notice I’m not “giving up” something I enjoy--I’m simply being more intentional about another positive choice.

Those who know me know that I choose a focus word every year. This year’s word is “hold.” It has come up in so many different ways since Jan. 1. I had my own agenda of how I thought this word was going to come around in my life, but, as always plays out, God had bigger plans of revealing himself with the way this word is reflected in my daily life. Hold can mean waiting on doing something and focusing on something else. Hold can mean taking a complete break. Hold can mean hanging onto something and appreciating it for all it is.

I see a direct tie-in with using this word during Lent. I can “hold” onto some of the things I enjoy--using any of the definitions. It can help me be more intentional in focusing on other things. Some people

have chosen to read more. This ties in with using screen-time (phone, tablet, television) less. Some people choose to exercise more. This can mean eating healthier and less junk food. One might even choose a Sabbath --a complete break from things. It doesn’t have to be a whole day. It could be taking an evening off. I could return to my childhood way of donating money to a worthy cause. If I gave a dollar a day, this is \$40 over six weeks. Most can afford this by giving up one specialty coffee a week.

Be intentional in your Lenten focus. Find something meaningful. I still don’t practice “letting go” or “giving something up.” I still believe that my loving God wants me to enjoy the things that bring me joy. I do think He wants me to continue drawing closer to him. I will focus on my word “hold” throughout Lent and spend more time working on relationships.

Less time with “stuff” and more time with people. How about you?



*Becky Rogowski is the Generations in Faith Together Coordinator at Hays First Presbyterian*

## ***Lent Allows Us to Walk Along with Jesus in the Desert***

**Written by:**

***Cheryl Glassman***

As a "cradle Catholic," I have observed the part of the Liturgical Church Year known as "Lent" for as long I can remember. I recently read an article that said an estimated one-third of Americans observe Lent. It is known as a time of fasting, reflection, preparation, and sacrifice. Lent allows those who believe to walk along with Jesus during His time of sacrifice--the 40 days in the desert.

According to the Gospels, Jesus did spend 40 days alone in the desert. That is what our Lent is based upon; however, Jesus "gave up" a lot more than 40 days, and so did those who loved him. Jesus left his heavenly home to become man and help us to know God the Father through him. He left his home and family to do God's will. Everything Jesus did went against the principles of the Romans, and the Sadducees and Pharisees did not understand him.

For Catholics, Lent begins with ashes. We are "signed" with ashes--the priest makes the sign of the cross on our foreheads with ashes. The ashes are from burnt palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday, the

Sunday before Easter, commemorates Jesus' triumphant ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, when people spread palm leaves on the ground ahead of him.

I had the true honor of bestowing ashes when I was a chaplain at HaysMed. As people came forward to receive them and stood before me, or as I bestowed them on the patients, I would make the sign of the cross on their foreheads and say, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," or, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The ashes help us remember we need to turn from our evil ways and know that in the end, we are all called to leave this earth and be with God. Lent, then, is a time of reflection, and the giving up of something, or participating more fully in caring for others. It is not just to be a rote action. Our Lenten observances are to help us find a true change of heart and mind and to prepare for the wonder of Holy Week and Easter and carry it on in the days to come.

Over the years, as I have observed Lent, I have seen this and felt Jesus' love in and around me. Yes, I do "give up" something during Lent--

something that makes me really think; but I also make an effort to pray more, and to serve God by serving others more.

Lent is not necessarily to be a drudgery. Being the music director at a church during Lent is a rather exciting time. There are special songs we sing to help guide our thoughts, and we have specific biblical readings to do the same. There are certain times within the Liturgical Church Year when being with a congregation makes it more profound, and Lent is one of them. It also seems to me that more people attend church services. Maybe they feel, as I do, a sense of needing to gather with others to pray and reflect. I also spend more time in personal, private prayer during Lent.

So in essence, then, Lent may be a time of "letting go" or "giving up" something, but it is also a time of turning back, giving, and lifting up. Writing my article on Valentine's Day kind of put a different light on the meaning of Lent. As it says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life."

As it says in the song



## ***Lent Allows Us to Walk Along with Jesus (Continued)***

“Gracious God” by Jesse Manibusan, “Lead us, Lord, into the desert; lead us through the wilderness. Through this journey we will follow, for we long to see your

face. Gracious God, mercy is your name, redeeming love you give your life away.”

May your Lent be filled with redeeming love.



*Cheryl Glassman is the Minister of Music at St. Nicolas of Myra Catholic Church in Hays.*

### ***What Am I Giving Up for Lent? Single-Use Plastics***

**Written by:**  
**Anna Towns**

Lent is my favorite season in the Liturgical (church) year. A season of patience, penance, and self-denial definitely does not have the commercial appeal of Christmas or Easter. However, these 40 days from Ash Wednesday (the day after Mardi Gras) to Easter may be just the time we need to grapple with hard truths and look anew at our faith lives.

It fills me with a sense of calm to have the ashes (or Glitter+Ash) placed on my forehead each Ash Wednesday, and to be reminded that there is a cycle to this thing called life. Many churches use ashes made from discarded palms from Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter)—bringing us full circle in this church season.

At Trinity Lutheran Church, 2703 Fort, we “bury” the Alleluia and refrain from using this celebratory word for the entire Lenten season, resurrecting it to use fervently during Easter Sunday celebrations. The traditions of Maundy Thursday include foot washing (not a favorite of mine) and a shared Communion meal—sometimes even a Seder dinner. My favorite worship service of the whole church year is Good Friday. This service marks Christ’s death on the cross, and it is a somber and moving affair. Our astonishment at the Easter miracle of Jesus’ resurrection would be nothing without the profound loss experienced at Christ’s death on Good Friday.

During Lent, we hear the story of Jesus tempted by Satan in the desert and wandering in the wilderness

for 40 days, and we end the season with the loss of our friend and Savior, Jesus Christ. These deprivations and loss are the basis for some Christians choosing to give up something for the Lenten season.

Growing up in the Lutheran tradition, I observed the season of Lent, but not by giving up anything. (I thought that was strictly a Catholic thing.) Recently, I saw a trend among friends who were not Catholic. They were “giving up” by “giving away” (donating something to charity each of the 40 days of Lent). In 2020, this led me to #NoPlasticsForLent. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has a program for Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM), and in 2020 the group issued a challenge on its blog.

This hashtag was a call to

## ***What Am I Giving Up for Lent? Single-Use Plastics (Continued)***

give up single-use plastics for Lent. This would definitely be a sacrifice in this era of plastic-wrapped plastic cutlery and the like. Seriously, stop for a moment and think about all the single-use plastic in our daily lives (hygiene items like shampoo bottles, deodorant containers, food wrappings/packaging, plastic and Styrofoam containers for take-out, plastic straws and cutlery, ugh. I digress.)

My draw to this challenge was twofold. I believe it is my duty as a Christian to be a good steward of the resources God has provided, and I wanted to focus more on my spiritual life during Lent. For a journey like this, I needed a partner (misery loves company). I shared the YAGM blog posts and videos with Us 4 U, the FHSU student organization that my church co-sponsors. I was also able to persuade my mother (Trinity member and Us 4 U

faculty sponsor) to join the fun.

This was not my first no-plastics rodeo. I have attempted the #PlasticFreeJulyChallenge a couple of times, and I try to be a conscientious consumer. However, this spiritual practice was hard—especially as a person who eats take-out more than she cooks and whose “cooking” usually involves the microwave. Not to mention, March of 2020 was the beginning of the COVID pandemic, so not only did the number of plastic-wrapped items in the grocery stores increase significantly, but a lot of my go-to tactics, such as bringing my own container to the deli to get lunchmeat and cheese or bringing my own refillable bottle for drinks when eating out, were not options.

Needless to say, I was not able to eradicate every bit of single-use plastic from my life in those 40 days, but I am

happy to report that it led to many lifestyle changes that my mother and I try to maintain—and it deepened my connection to this amazing creation of God’s, our world.

I took the challenge as an opportunity to thank God for humans’ innovative spirit, and to ask for God’s intervention when greed or laziness outweighs adherence to our duty as stewards. I encourage you to give up something this Lent—whether it is a caffeine addiction, extra clothes from your closet, or single-use plastics. In those moments when you feel withdrawal or when you fail, pray and know that you are not alone in the struggle. During Lent, remember the sacrifice God made, repent, and rejoice.



*Anna Towns is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Hays.*



**"FASTING CONFIRMS OUR UTTER DEPENDENCE UPON GOD BY FINDING IN HIM A SOURCE OF SUSTENANCE BEYOND FOOD." - DALLAS WILLARD**