

The season of Epiphany is rather short this year, The worship committee is already making preparations for the season of Lent which begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14 (yes Valentine's day this year.) Some faith traditions encourage folks to "give up" something for Lent. I suggest that you **"take on"** something for Lent. A more beneficial practice for our spiritual life would be to **add something to nurture and enrich our spiritual lives**. Specifically, consider this letter a call letter to participate in our Wednesday evening Lenten devotions.

Of course some of us have an Emily Dickinson attitude towards corporate worship. She wrote, "Some keep the Sabbath going to church/ I keep it by staying at home." Staying at home is the norm for society that has a negative effect on church communities. If you attend worship and look around, you will notice a growing absence of members attending worship weekly. At one time statisticians considered regular church worship to be weekly attendance, maybe missing a Sunday each month. Today the interpretation is often that regular church worship is attending worship once a month.

In the Large Catechism, Luther talks about the **communion or community of saints**. Our community of saints includes the holy people of God, baptized and claimed by God, to be united in love. The Holy Spirit gathers us, to teach us the will of God. Luther even calls us "a little holy flock" of pure saints. We are gathered to be nurtured by the Word of God and by the support and comfort of God's Holy People. This happens when we are together, not at home studying the word in isolation. Peter W. Marty, ELCA pastor and publisher of *Christian Century* wrote in the January 3<sup>rd</sup> edition:

I have decided that making...worship an integral part of one's life is highly inconvenient.... For those of us who make church a priority...worship is equally inconvenient, but in a different way. We sing songs we didn't pick, hear scriptures we didn't choose, commit to endeavors for which we must sacrifice, and here's the worse—sit next to people who aren't even our closest friends."

But I will add that there are many benefits to be gained from assembling as a Christian community. A hymn expresses this thought better than I can:

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love,  
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above  
We share each other's woes, each other's burdens bear,  
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.  
From sorrow, toil and pain and sin we shall be free  
And perfect love and joy shall reign through all eternity.

I am not talking about the inconvenience of gathering for worship or bible study. I am talking about the inherent benefits of gathering as a community. Marty concludes his essay by reminding us that "It is impossible to have Jesus Christ apart from the church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reading of the apostle Paul led him to say that we cannot know Christ apart from Christian community. As wonderful as it might be to have Christ apart from the hypocrisies and distractions of other people who believe, Christ is embedded in the church." I look forward to being with you on Sunday worship and at our Wednesday evening gatherings during Lent as we prepare for the Easter feast.

Shalom,

*Pastor Bev*