



*Dear friends in Christ,*

In the winter darkness we lit candles at the dinner table and ate breakfast in the dark. Now the sun slants across our breakfast table so brightly that we squint and adjust the shades. A few sunny days have us imagining the rains are finished, even though we know they can't be.

Each year I seem to appreciate the changing seasons more. I'm glad life is not static and that nature itself urges us onward. As spring approaches, the season of Lent directs us toward repenting and improving our lives.

In the past, Lent seemed like a downer to me. I didn't want to linger over what was wrong with me, and I figured everyone had enough guilt already. Today I have greater respect for the power of denial and how stubbornly we can refuse to see or deal with problems that are within our power to correct. I am more aware of violence, racism, poverty and other systemic evils that diminish people. And being a parent has made me more concerned than ever about the future of our planet and the health of generations to come.

The powers of sin and death are plenty active, in us and around us. I have come to love Lent because it forces us to confront this reality and grieve it. Yet "we do not grieve as those who are without hope." God has invested God's self and God's Son to make this world new.

Repenting is the way we open ourselves up to God's power and God's new way. During Lent we always start worship by confessing our sin, followed immediately by the assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness. No matter what brokenness we bring before God, we are met with God's compassion and the opportunity to begin again. Faith practices like prayer, fasting, and serving others help us act our way into God's future.

We cannot go from darkness to light without Christ's help. So it is right that as we move from winter into spring, we also trace Jesus' path toward Jerusalem, where he will greet his death and accomplish our salvation.

The last Sunday of this month is **Palm Sunday**, when we will hear the story of Christ's last days. Then comes Holy Week, when we worship both on **Maundy Thursday** and **Good Friday**, learning the depth of our Lord's love and sacrifice. Then will come Easter. But first we have some blessed spiritual work to do.

With you in repentance and hope,

*Pastor Melinda*