

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 103; 2 Cor 5:20b-6:10; Matt 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday – Year A – March 1, 2017

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Today is Ash Wednesday, and we set out on a journey—the journey through Lent, marking our time with intention. There are a number of Lenten resources in the Narthex, and I hope you’ll find one that suits you. When I was on sabbatical in 2015 I had the great privilege of studying at St. George’s College in Jerusalem. The course I took was *Children of Abraham* and we followed Abraham’s steps all around Israel/Palestine, visiting Jewish, Christian, and Muslim holy sites. One of my classmates from Australia sent word recently of Lenten book called *Abraham: A Journey Through Lent* by Meg Warner. Meg is a Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King’s College, London. She is from Australia and spent three months in 2015 at Virginia Seminary where she held the position of Trotter Fellow. She taught there and she wrote. She is an Old Testament scholar and the Abrahamic stories have been “at the heart of her academic work...shaping and undergirding her way of living.”¹

She begins the book talking about her journey from Melbourne to make a new home in the United Kingdom. London was to be her new home and place of new life with her husband to be. She shed many of her belongings, said farewells, and packed what she was taking. On the Australian customs form she had checked

¹ Meg Warner, *Abraham: A Journey Through Lent* (London: SPCK, 2015), ix.

the box “Resident Departing Permanently.” It was a definitive move for her much the way Abraham set out to leave his country, his family, and his father’s household.

I was intrigued by the book based on my travels and study with Abraham and the uniqueness of Abraham as a companion vs. Jesus in most Lenten books. It is a book with which I will journey through Lent, and Meg promises that the similarities of Abraham’s journey will lead to many places that one would follow Jesus to Golgotha. More to come on that...

With this notion of setting out on a journey, I was especially struck by the words of Isaiah, particularly as the writer speaks of fasting. What is the fast that I choose? What is the fast that you choose? So many of us give up something for Lent, and that becomes our fast. Isaiah’s writer is reminding is that fasting can also be a fast to something vs. from something. It can be a taking on a discipline that who knows might become a discipline you embrace much beyond these 40 days of Lent.

Isaiah’s writer takes us into the depths of meaningful fast.

Might this be a fast that you choose?

- to loose the bonds of injustice
- to undo the thongs of the yoke
- to let the oppressed go free

- to break every yoke
- to share your bread with the hungry
- to bring the homeless into your home
- to clothe the naked
- to not hide yourself from your own kin

The Israelites had returned from exile in Babylon. The peoples were looking for times of restoration and were discerning where God was in the process of rebuilding their lives. It was a time for them to start anew.

Lent is a time for us to start anew and to seriously ponder where God is in the process of making something new in us. I invite you to sit with the prophet Isaiah and to think about your fast. What is the fast that you choose as we begin this journey of Lent? It's more than giving up things. It can be a time to try on something new and life giving. What is the fast that you choose?

Let us pray with the words of T. S. Eliot from the end of his poem "Ash Wednesday":

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

Even among these rocks,

Our peace in His will

And even among these rocks

Sister, mother

And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,

Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.²

Amen.

² T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1963), 105.