

A Message from Rev. Craig

Dear friends,

With Easter fast approaching, I find myself reflecting on the Christian faith of my childhood, which included the observation of Lent. As a boy I was taught Lent was about sacrifice, an act of giving up something one likes. I often gave up chocolate. One year I gave up teasing my sister. But, I didn't make it past a week with either of these sacrifices.

Because sacrifice is usually associated with personal or collective deprivation it often carries a negative connotation in our consumer culture. It is something we're forced into, often out of lack of time or money, or something we endure for someone or something else, our children, career, country, etc. Such views of sacrifice in a world that already seems to ask too much of us only adds to our sense of physical, mental and spiritual exhaustion.

Yet in many of the world's faith traditions, the spiritual meaning of sacrifice points to something deeper than our contemporary understanding suggests.

In Hebrew the root of the word for sacrifice means "to draw near" (as in to draw near the God).

In Islam, sacrifice concerns one's personal willingness to submit one's ego and individual will to Allah.

In Hinduism, sacrifice is also a form of surrender through prayer, acts of kindness and offerings to represent devotion, aspiration, and karmic healing. All to draw one closer to or align one's life with the Holy.

Buddhism takes a somewhat different approach. Buddhists make offerings and give to the poor but not out of the conviction that sacrifice is important to spiritual well-being. In Buddhism giving things up is a way of reminding us that desire and aversion are the source of suffering. Sacrifice serves as a reminder that happiness isn't achieved by getting what we want, but realized in letting go of attachments that prevent us from seeing and engaging life deeply.

As these glimpses into the role of sacrifice from various religions illustrate, meaningful sacrifice carries with it the intention to draw near to that which gives and sustains life. It is as much about giving attention to something as giving up something. Indeed, sacrifice is an act of both giving up and taking up.

The temptation story in Luke's Gospel (4:1-13), well known to those who observe Lent, demonstrates this quite effectively. Here, Jesus gives up or sacrifices the use of conventional displays of power, despite the devil's goading, that he may take up his call from God to be a servant leader. To lead not by force, but by example; not by demanding obedience, but through service.

Sacrifice is an intentional act in which we seek to draw nearer to a deeper life or, if you prefer, God. It is a response to life's abundance rather than a reaction to scarcity. It is what we do when we give time to gather for worship together, set aside time for a friend, or choose some time alone. It is what we do when we end an unhealthy relationship, welcome a stranger, or stand in

solidarity with the oppressed. And it is what we do when we reach out for help, letting go of our independence in recognition of our interdependence.

True sacrifice is not an act of reluctant self-deprivation; it is an act of courage rooted in love that begins by inviting that which is Holy to dwell in and among us and in the process, risk being changed in ways we can't imagine.

Peace and Blessings,

Rev. Craig