

A Pentecostal “Lent”

by Clara Carter

Before I turned nine years of age, with the consent of my mother, I became a member of a Pentecostal church in a small southern town. The membership was around 60-65 people including children. I don't recall the elders of my church mentioning the word “Lent” but they talked about abstinence for 40 days beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with Easter Sunday. The pastors and some of the members fasted during that period. A few pledged to give up watching a favorite soap opera or a talk show on their black and white televisions. Still others chose to abstain from different kinds of food, like dairy products and meat.

At 12 years old I was allowed to participate with the adults in observing the period of abstinence. We didn't have a TV in our home, so that was no problem. My mother usually fasted—eating one meal a day. I chose to fast too—but the food smelled so good. My younger siblings put on a big show of smacking their lips loudly as they chimed, “hey, this taste so good mmm—take a bite, come on you know you want to” while laughing and nudging each other. Mom told them behave but they continued to giggle quietly and made boo-boo faces at me. In short time it became unbearable to wait until evening to eat. Needless to say, after two days my good intentions folded. I am thankful for God's love that nothing bad happened when I started back eating regularly.

On Ash Wednesdays, our church doors were opened from noon to about four o'clock for members who wanted to pray or sit in silence. A few retirees and stay-at-home mothers with small children came but most of the church members worked during the day and were required to stay at their jobs until quitting time.



On Palm Sundays, our pastor preached about the great multitude of people who worshipped Jesus with loud cries and praises of “. . . Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9 NKJV) as He rode through the streets of Jerusalem on the back of a donkey His disciples had acquired at His request.

On Good Fridays, about 25-45 members including children attended the night worship service. The pastor would deliver a fiery sermon about Jesus' Last Supper with his twelve disciples, and how one of the disciples (Judas) would betray him. The pastor further expatiated about Jesus prayer of distress in the Garden of Gethsemane, His horrific suffering at the hands of the Roman government, Pharisees, Scribes and false witnesses; and His agonizing walk to Calvary where he was nailed to the cross.

After the sermon, the pastor made altar calls for sinners and backsliders who wanted prayers or wanted to be baptized. Next was the ritual of washing each other's feet as Jesus had done with His disciples before the Last Supper. Afterwards we did communion with the breaking of bread and a small sip of wine in the remembrance of Jesus' body and his Death.

The first time I participated in what I now know as "Lent" felt like a rite of passage into adulthood, a formal demonstration of spiritual practice, an awareness of a new beginning that Jesus gave us through His death and resurrection. Although it felt different, I sensed the sameness as I did hugging trees, or before daybreak, taking a short trek through dew-laden weeds to an enormous rock climb to the top and sit yoga-style. In the silence I'd breathe quietly, feeling the soft vibrations of the earth as it greeted the new day.