

Dark and Light in Lent

by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

In my youth, I was told that Easter was God's light while Good Friday, and all of Lent, are darkness. Of course, we know the accounts of the darkness that came over the land at the Crucifixion, and the darkness of the tomb. However, the idea that Lent is a time of darkness does not feel right to me, especially due to the view in our culture, and in our faith, as darkness seen as bad or evil and light seen as good and holy.

I suspect that the view of Lent as a dark time arises, at least in part, because we are called to go deeper in our selves, to look inward, to assess how we are doing spiritually. This can so easily lead to pain. We see our limitations, our failures close up. We know how far short we have fallen. In short, Lent can feel like too much hard work. And yet, like Jesus in the wilderness, God makes angels available to help us, if we pay attention.



I grew up with the question, “what are you giving up for Lent?” However, I have learned there are other ways to approach Lent. For instance, what new behavior am I developing? Can I sit in quiet contemplation to take my own inventory and use it to make changes? Or how about spending extended times with God in prayer and meditation—

where I talk less and listen more?

I am writing this not to shame myself or anyone else, but to help me live a holy and life-giving Lent. I want to ponder life, listen to my heart, to God, to see what is good about my life and what I want to change, to wander in the wilderness of my soul and grow more comfortable there.

After I wrote these lines, I paused and sat quietly and asked God for direction. Two things came to consciousness: stand up and slow down.

Stand Up.

My doctor tells me that if I had good posture my recurring lower back pain would be greatly reduced. Turns out, she is correct. But oh my, a lifetime (70 years) of slouching (sometimes a reaction to being tall and having to look down to talk to others) is hard to break. I am beginning to see that maybe God would like me to stand tall, to accept and celebrate the gift of my body. I was created tall, so why not live tall?

Slow Down.

In the past few years, I have come to see that most of my life I have lived a life of performance, meaning I have done my best to please others, to do what I think others want, to win applause. That has meant that just kept doing stuff, not pausing to consider what I want, what my soul yearns for, but how to keep people liking and paying attention to me, or at least not being angry with me.

Thus, I have been habitually busy and overworked. For the past several years, after retiring from pastoring and leading non-profit organizations, I have been working for myself. So I am my own boss now. In some ways, I am a harder boss than any I ever worked for or with. I still live with endless to do lists and self-judgment about how I am not getting enough done.

One way I also can help myself is change this is by sharing it with my faith community. If you ever feel like it, feel free to ask me, “Robin, how is that slowing down coming, or how’s your standing up?” You can be *my* angels in the wilderness.