

**Sermon :: 09-Mar-2025**  
**Lent I, Year C**

“ you ... shall celebrate with all the bounty that  
the LORD your God has given you ”

There aren't ... at least so far as *I* know ... any greeting cards for Lent. Now, for many folks, the holidays wouldn't be complete without sending a small pile of *Christmas* cards ... and perhaps Hallmark really did 'invent' *Valentine's Day* to boost card sales ... and even *Halloween* cards are now a 'thing!' But not *Lent*.

And maybe that's because it's hard to reduce this season to one pithy sentiment. We readily wish one another a "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year." "Alleluia! He is risen!" springs from our lips on Easter ... and "We will remember them" echoes through our hearts on Memorial Day. But what of Lent? "Have a holy (or a blessed) Lent" isn't *wrong* ... but also pretty generic. "Have a **repentant Lent**" is more theologically fitting ... but also rather a mouthful! And even though *someone*, no doubt, could probably make a buck **off it** ... "Happy **Penitence!**" just won't work!

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Lent strikes me differently every time it rolls around again ... I need to discern, each year, what to *make* of it—*do* with it ... come up with a *fresh* approach to this season of introspection and preparation ... of taking stock of our all-too-human failings and anticipating Christ's superseding perfection. And *this* year, at least ... I'd like to invite us into a Lent of *renewal*: a Lent of *gratitude* and *hope*: a Lent of reappraising and appreciating all that we have ... a Lent of turning away from the chaotic grasping—"more! more! more!"—of *this* world ... and embracing, instead, the serene simplicity—"it is well with my soul"—of *heaven*.

And to do this, I'm suggesting we take as our 'master text' for this season the words of one of the truly great ... if little-sung<sup>1</sup> ... hymns in our hymnal: Hymn 10, **[8:00: which I'm inviting us to meditate on each Sunday in Lent, during communion // 10:15: which we'll sing each Sunday in Lent after communion]**. They were written by a thoughtful nineteenth-century English priest named John Keble ... and appeared in an anthology of his poetry, entitled *The Christian Year*: an original poem for every Sunday and feast day of the year, as well as many other occasions—some 103 entries, in all. Keble's diction and style may seem stilted and even a little precious to *our* ears ... but he was deeply in touch with the tenor of **his** times, for *The Christian Year* sold more than 350,000 copies ... and ran to over 150 editions ... during the middle fifty years of the 1800s. (I'll have a copy out at coffee hour if you'd like to peruse it.)

And fittingly ... "Morning," the poem that's the basis of our Hymn 10,<sup>2</sup> is the very first entry in the collection. After an opening paean to the "hues of rich unfolding morn" and the "rustling breeze so fresh and gay, that dancest forth at opening day" ... and don't worry: *those* florid sentiments didn't make it into the hymnal! ... Keble then lines out, in six stanzas, a holistic pattern of Christian daily living: ¶of rising each day in gratitude ... ¶of cultivating an awareness of the holiness that's all around us ... ¶and of thinning down our lives to an essential walk with God, in grace. Shorn of its

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<sup>1</sup> Such may not have been the case before the late twentieth century, when Holy Eucharist became the normative Sunday morning liturgy in the Episcopal Church. Previously, the Morning Office was most parishes' experience of the Lord's Day, and this is a morning hymn.

<sup>2</sup> The hymn comprises six of the poem's sixteen stanzas.

flowery celebration of dawn and dew ... the text of Keble's "Morning" has struck me, as I've come to know it over the last few months, as an almost-perfect exploration of ... an invitation to ... indeed, a *blueprint* for ... Christian renewal—*daily* renewal; *purposeful* renewal; *prayerful* renewal ... that can serve as a thoughtful, evocative guide ... a 'pocket map,' if you will ... for our Lenten journey.

And so, let us set off!

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Our lessons today are stories of *beginnings*: of Israel's anticipated entry into its new home—the gift of God—in the Promised Land, after forty *years* of wandering in the wilderness ... and of Jesus' opening His earthly ministry with forty *days* of wandering in *another* wilderness ... while being tempted by—and resisting the lure of—Satan. And both are accounts of *gratitude* and *hope*:

- The Israelites are to<sup>3</sup> express their thanksgiving to God by offering the first *fruits* of their first *harvest* ... the first *risings* in a new land ... thus, their grasping—leaning *into*—the *promise* ... the *pregnancy* ... the *holy potential* ... of this wonderful new 'day' in the life of God's people.
- And while the story of Jesus' temptation is of an entirely different tenor ... nevertheless, His declining Satan's dangling of earthly power bespeaks Jesus' *thankfulness* for what the Father has *already* provided ... and Jesus' refusal to test the sureness and scope of God's protection is a testament to the *hope* that lives in Jesus' heart.

For Israel, a new day in a new land. For Christ, a new day in new ministry. For us, a new day in a new season. And *each* new day ... each new *beginning* ... suffused with *gratitude* and *hope*.

And this is exactly the message ... the *calling* ... of the opening two stanzas of Keble's [8: poem // 10: hymn]. We rise, as from sleep, reaffirmed in the eternally-new, always-abundant love of God: deeply *grateful* to have passed through the inertia and vulnerability **of night** ... and to be called, once again, to the activity and agency **of day**. And we're buoyantly *hopeful* for all the goodness—mercy and forgiveness; prayer answered and heaven envisioned—that lies before us.

To be sure, these thoughts make this ... as its title proclaims ... a *morning* hymn: **a poem for the dawn** of day ... **a poem to be recited** at the sun's each new rising ... a poem to embrace the promise of the dawn and seize the opportunity of yet another day.

But these *same* thoughts ... it seems to me ... apply *equally* well to the 'morning' of Lent: **a poem for the dawn** of a season ... **a poem to be recited** upon the threshold of reflection and repentance ... a poem to remind ourselves ... before we embark, once more, upon the soul-searching and heart-turning work of Lent ... that God ... in all God's grace and bounty ... has *already* forgiven and redeemed the 'night' of our sinfulness, on Christ's Cross ... has *already* restored and rebirthed us into the 'day' of divine grace, at His empty Easter tomb. These two stanzas remind us that Lent is *not* a season for us to (somehow) save *ourselves*, despite all our *failures* ... but rather, to learn to

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<sup>3</sup> Technically, this text, like the entire Book of Deuteronomy, is a forward-looking instruction from Moses, who will not accompany the Israelites into the Land, about what to do after they've arrived.

*accept*, gratefully, Christ's *already* having saved us, despite all our *un-deservingness* ... and to discover how to live *fully into* the *hope* of our salvation.

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Israel stands at the threshold of a new land ... full of potential perils and hostile inhabitants ... and still, Moses paints them a picture of *gratitude* and *love*. Jesus—on His first day on His 'new job'—finds Himself standing toe-to-toe with the very Fount of Evil ... and still, He boldly proclaims His *hope* and *assurance*, in God alone.

We, too, stand at a threshold: at the dawning of a season that may lead us to realizations about ourselves that we don't like ... to understandings that make us question **choices we've made** or **company we're keeping** ... to redirecting the course of our lives so we may *sail* closer *to*, rather than *drift* farther *from*, Christ, in love and discipleship. For this is the warp and weft of Lent: the thoughtful examination of self ... knitted to the persistent calling of Christ. And, for sure, there will be time for all that!

But *today* ... as we *awaken* to another Lent ... as we *stir* ourselves from the slumber of self-satisfaction and open our eyes, anew, to the One True Light ... let us **begin** this season in a spirit of *gratitude* and *hope*: knowing and celebrating, with the ancient Israelites, that this new thing—new *time*—that lies ahead of us ... is a *gift from the God* Who loves us and calls us and sustains us; and proclaiming with conviction, as **did** Jesus to His tempter, that nothing on earth can, or ever will, separate us from our already-oneness with God. For

New every morning *is* the love  
our waking and uprising prove ...

New mercies, each returning day  
around us hover while we pray[:]  
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

My prayer for us ... at this new dawn of another season ... is that this Lent be a time of *renewal* ... a new *morning* ... for our souls: new *thoughts* of *God* awaking ... new *hopes* of *heaven* uprising. Perhaps—at last—the 'stuff' of a Lenten greeting card, after all!

THE REV DOUGLAS S WORTHINGTON  
All Souls' Episcopal Church  
San Diego, CA