

February 25, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I remember back on February 2, Ground Hog Day, the ground hog saw his shadow indicating that we would have six more weeks of winter. Or to put it more positively, Spring would arrive in six weeks! I don't know about you but these have been the longest weeks in history for me. Perhaps, like many of you, a long-lasting cold has not been beneficial to my spirit. I remember one Charlie Brown comic strip in which Charlie says very wisely to Linus who was feeling dejected and feeling guilty about those feeling, "Don't worry Linus, you need the downs so that you can appreciate the ups!"

Of all the seasons of the church year, Lent is, perhaps the most sobering. We don't get down as such but we are called to be honest in the light of Jesus' teachings. Our self-examination is to include all parts of our lives and our relationships. Our self-questioning ranges from; how am I spending God's blessings? Am I being a good steward of creation? Do I make specific times for talking with God? Listening to God? Am I giving the first fruits of my life to God or whatever is left over? Am I a good neighbor? Have I been kind to a stranger today? Every facet of our lives is to be lifted up to the light of Christ. Nothing can be hid or swept under the rug.

All this self-examination makes Lent seem like the longest season of the church year. But, dear friends, self-examination is important. We need those times in which we stop and look honestly at ourselves. Sometimes we don't like what we see and this opens the door for Christ to step into our lives. The great mystery of our faith takes place and we are re-born. Many think conversion is only for nonbelievers, but the Bible sees conversion or re-birth as also necessary for the erring believer. Be encouraged! God gives us a second chance, a third, and maybe even a fourth! All of which only highlights the importance of self-examination.

John Newton's famous hymn, *Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound*, is a product of self-examination and re-birth. Newton, you may remember his story, was captain of a slave ship. The Holy Spirit rested on him and caused his re-birth. Now I know none of us are slave traders but we may be encouraging slavery in our purchasing choices. When we purchase item from a country that does not have child-protection laws or allows 'sweat-shop' clothing fabricators to flourish; we are guilty. Lent is a time of thinking about every facet of our lives.

I pray that as you honestly look inside your heart and mind that you also become bathed in the love of God. God loves us so much God sent His Son to show us the way of repentance and through which we receive the capacity to fully receive God's forgiveness. Blessings to all.

*Pastor Peggy*