



February 21, 2018

### ***LENT, RITUAL, AND DOING JUSTICE***

One of the criticisms that people level against the Christian church is that we are more interested in going through the motions of ritual than we are in acting with justice, mercy, and love. It's an old problem. The rituals of our faith are meant to shape our hearts toward those words of the prophet Micah: to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

The season of Lent is a traditional time of reflection and penitence in preparation for Easter, and Lenten rituals have included various kinds of fasting: fasts from meat, chocolate, and anything cooked with fat. Mardi Gras is the "fat Tuesday" before Ash Wednesday, and traces back to the practice of eating up all the fat in the house before Lent begins. In some parts of the church, Christians refrained from celebrating marriages during Lent.

The Lenten fast is connected to the ancient Jewish practice of fasting as a sign of penitence, and turning toward God. In a passage that dates to the sixth century B.C.E., the prophet Isaiah speaks against the hypocrisy of a fast for penitence without any attention to God's vision for our lives.

*"Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,  
and oppress all your workers.  
Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?  
Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
... to let the oppressed go free."*

Isaiah 58:3, 5-6

Whether or not you give up something for Lent, let's make this a season of turning toward God in rituals of worship and prayerful awareness, that we may be shaped for doing justice in the world around us.

I'll see you in church.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster  
Senior Minister