

Leadership

Prayer letter: April 2011

LENT

We are deep into the middle of Lent. For those of us who have chosen to observe some kind of fasting, the separation, whether it is coming to mean freedom, or loss for us, is almost sealed. For some, Easter is looming so close; so much to be done (and finished) before the school holidays bring a break in normal patterns, rosters and volunteers, and possibly increased intensity with Holiday Programs.



Letting Go

I have set aside driving for the period of Lent (with just a couple of exceptions, so that my kids don't suffer). Lots of things have emerged already; a slower pace, doing less different things in a day, a few more frequent rides (even short ones) in the car with my husband increasing our communication opportunities and 'checking in' with each other; a few more walks to public transport in the sunshine with the opportunity for God to speak in different ways, images, tones; less shopping; surprise encounters of grace with strangers on public transport; creative thinking in planning schedules...

Let's pray for one another in the things we have let go of for lent, supporting each other's spiritual discipline.

Let's also pray for things that perhaps in more enduring ways we might be called to relinquish.

- A few churches I know of are seriously considering whether it is time to let go of their impressively creative and well attended, high energy, intense resource demand Holiday programs, and make way for something new that the God of mission may be cooking up.
- Some church communities may be called to give up their focus on Sunday mornings as the centre of their life, in order to make room for new expressions of invitation and the hospitality of God.

Prayer letter: April 2011 continued...

Community

One of the aspects of Lent which has been largely lost is the idea of a whole community fast. There is a different dynamic when the whole community shifts gear and changes its practice. When a whole community lets go its grip on something, it is more deeply pervasive freedom. For example in the idea of Sabbath, no one is to work or to exist in a way that compels another to work. We have a significant impact in giving each other permission and affirmation in changing our practice.

Still, on a smaller scale, we are also affected by the choices of others. I have a few friends who have given up Facebook for Lent. Their choices have meant different things in each case: redefining of the relationship in 'face to face' terms, simply a 'quieter' time for me, and expressing more intentional measured communications through email. And I am aware of how my own transport fasting also has shifted dynamics in relationship and community for others.

- Pray for our communities, that our culture may be one of walking lightly on the earth, letting go of what is not needed and encouraging in each other the disciplines of the ways of Jesus.
- Pray for increased awareness of ways we can be part of transformation of relationships and cultural interactions in our communities, bringing the habits and hopes of the kingdom.
- Pray for permission giving within your faith community to give up old habits that have ossified and are constraining renewal.

Hearing and encountering God in Fasting: A prayer

*Loving God, the God who speaks and satisfies,
O God who more than speaks, but who is the Word,
the word made flesh,
who has words of eternal life, and who gives bread
broken, yet abundant;
As our stomachs yearn for food, let our ears yearn for
your words.
As our tongues thirst for a familiar intoxication, let our
spirits thirst for your overwhelming,
As our eyes yearn for familiar friends, let our hearts
yearn for your outward bound love.
As our bodies crave convenient comforts let our vision
be drawn beyond ourselves
to be emptied into the world you love,
being only filled with your passion for the longing and
the longed for, the lost, the locked
the laboured and lamenting.
Let our Lenting make room for **love and justice**.
Amen*



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Struggling

Our fasting also unmasks our struggles. Our crippled dependence on not-gods. Our obsessions with substance or practices that are not life-giving. Our fears of loss are confronted in the midst of actual, if temporary loss. Even Jesus confronted the forces of these struggles in his fasting – the dependence on resources, power and status.

- Pray for each other in the struggles of mission: for those who lack resources, who are marginalised in their community, and who are despised. This touches many of us in different forms.

(We do not live by bread alone. Matthew 4:4)



- Pray for the struggle over the provisions for religious education: pray for our schools, our government, our churches, our volunteer teachers, ACCESS ministries and our media voices. Pray especially that the experience of children, who are often greatly encouraged and empowered by the half hour of reflection - as their inner voice of belief finds its way to the surface, and encounters acceptance and grace. In public ideological debates like this the perspective of children is rarely heard. Jesus would want to put them in the centre of our grown up arguments and shut us up.

(All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me. Matthew 4:9)



- Pray for the struggles of people and buildings. Pray for church communities reviewing their space allocation to worship and mission, for buildings with high maintenance needs, for churches seeking to plant new missional engagements and seeking to locate these, for churches who give much of their building usage to community groups. Pray for the economy and stewardship of the Kingdom of God to inform and govern in these situations.

(He had him stand on the highest point of the temple. Matthew 4:5)



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Celebration

Even within the solemnity of Lent, there is provision for celebration. God has always reminded his people of the intrinsic need for joyful rest and celebration, inscribed into the Law, and reinscribed in the restructuring after the exile. God calls us to a wholeness in which simplicity and relinquishment are partnered with exuberant ecstasy and shimmering delight, in relationship and in community.

And right before the final home straight the toughest slog, in Lent is Palm Sunday. This is a time not to hold back our whoops and shouts and songs and dances of glee at the goodness of God, lest the rocks be compelled to rise up put us to shame.

- Pray for each other in the expressions these celebrations will take in our churches and our streets and schools and other public spaces.
- Pray for children in particular to be encouraged and allowed to lift their voices, as they do in the gospels.
- Pray for the alternative culture of the Kingdom, of Justice and peace to enter our celebrations and process into our cities. Pray for ways to make public the reign of righteousness Jesus brings, spilling into our streets and homes, our commercial centres, and if necessary tipping the tables in our worship, too.

Grace and Peace to all,
Beth

