

Counselor's Corner: *Lent—and the places that scare you*

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There is a book on my shelf that I must admit I have not read all the way through. But I love the title. It's by a Buddhist author, Pema Chödrön, and the title is *The Places That Scare You*. The general suggestion of her writing is that we all have a natural tendency to avoid or even run away from the really difficult experiences of our lives. Fear, loneliness, grief, embarrassment, conflict, or any number of painful experiences might inspire us to use what we in the counseling world call "defense mechanisms" – ways of avoiding the pain, ignoring the reality, trying to get along without facing the experience head-on. Chödrön suggests that this impulse is ultimately self-defeating and self-limiting. She proposes that we need to gently and consistently enter into the "places that scare us" and allow ourselves to discover the lessons that life may have for us. "We need to be told that fear and trembling accompany growing up," she says. Her message is meant to be hopeful, implying that compassion and peace begin to spring up when we face our fears and difficulties with patience and openness.

I am no authority on Buddhism, but I can say that some of these ideas have encouraged me to think more deeply about the Christian tradition. For instance, I remember learning about the ancient roots of the season of Lent in my theology studies. In the ancient Church, there was a tradition of intense spiritual preparation by those adults who were to be baptized at Easter. These folks engaged in forty days of prayer and fasting along

with their community in order to make themselves open to God's saving power as they moved from the "kingdom of darkness" into the "kingdom of light." These early believers were referred to as *photozomenoi* – "those about to be enlightened." The forty days were reminiscent of the forty days Noah was in the ark or the forty years the Hebrews wandered in the desert before entering the Promised Land. It spoke to a time of difficulty and pain that issued forth into the fulfillment of God's promises.

I believe our contemporary practice of Lent invites us to face the darkness of our own lives (individually and communally) with the same hope for becoming enlightened by the grace of God that encouraged those early believers. I think Chödrön's notion that we need to face our scary places with gentleness and openness to what we can learn and how we can be changed is as good as any invitation into this season.

Lent can remind us that we can enter the scary places in our own hearts or in our families or workplaces or communities with the assurance that Christ goes before us and that we can find the ways his healing Spirit is already bringing forth life.

In many ways, this is what we try to do every day in the Counseling Center.



Steve Palmer

Westminster 2007 Lenten Worship *On the Way Home...*

Sundays

8:30am: Worship in the Chapel

9:30am: Chapel Communion service

10:30am: Worship in the Sanctuary

- March 11 ...*From Exile*
- March 18 ...*God Provides*
- April 25 ...*By a New Way*

Wednesdays

February 28, March 7, 14, 21 & 28

• **Noon** Chapel worship with music by pianist Nachito Herrera, followed by soup & salad lunch (\$7) catered by Staccato Restaurant.

- **6:15pm** Children's worship
- **6:30pm** Taizé service in the Great Hall

Palm Sunday, April 1

8:30am: Worship in the Chapel

10:30am: Worship in the Sanctuary

Maundy Thursday, April 5

Noon & 7:00pm

Worship in the Sanctuary

Good Friday, April 6

Noon service of Tenebrae in the Sanctuary

Sponsored by The Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

Easter Sunday, April 8

9:00am & 11:00am

Worship in the Sanctuary

Lenten Covenant Groups

Sundays from 9:15-10:15am

Tuesdays at 7:15pm

Wednesdays at 5:30pm & 7:15pm

Thursdays at 9:30am