

Sermon for 2019 Yr C Lent 4  
Preached Sunday 3/31/2019 at St. James', Mount Vernon  
By the Rev. Charles F. Brock

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Lent. We're half-way into Lent, and three weeks to go until Easter. How has Lent been so far for you? Have you been following a Lenten discipline? Or is Lent slipping by, without taking up much of your daily attention?

Well, in either case, give yourself a break. The Fourth Sunday of Lent is traditionally known as Refreshment Sunday, a day when we are allowed to relax the demands of our Lenten practices or to reset our plans for the season.

I never heard of Refreshment Sunday growing up, or even in the first several years that I was involved in the Episcopal Church. But I can vouch that it is an authentic tradition, with a long history... Wikipedia says so!

When I first heard of Refreshment Sunday, I was skeptical. After all, isn't a Lent a season of discipline, a time to try and do better, to be more faithful, to work harder at being a Christian? Lent isn't supposed to be easy, is it? Refreshment Sunday sounded like a cheat!

And of course, there's the rub. Our disciplines aren't supposed to be about doing more, or trying harder. Lent is about God, not about us, and yet when we focus on what we do and how well we do it, we make it about ourselves, whether by our accomplishments or our failures.

It seems that we are vulnerable to making Lent into a season in which we are living as if we have not already been saved by Jesus. Refreshment Sunday reminds us that while we prepare for Holy Week, we also live in the light of the resurrection. Just because it is Lent does not in any way diminish the brightness of the light of God's love that illuminates our lives today.

Refreshment Sunday is a helpful corrective for us at this point during Lent. Our lives have already been touched by God's light, and we are already living lives together that shine with that light. We are reaching out to enlighten the world with the news and knowledge of God's presence. But we all know that we can grow closer to God, we all know that we can trust God more deeply, we all know that there is a deeper peace to be found in God, if we can only let ourselves go there. And God is always there, inviting us to come to him, yearning for us to open ourselves to him.

Our Lenten practices are counter-productive if they are not bringing us closer to God. Refreshment Sunday is an opportunity for us to reset our expectations. If you are giving something up, it isn't in order to show how resolute you can be, but rather, to make more room in your life for God. If you are taking something on, it isn't to show what you can do, but to develop new habits of God-awareness that can last long after Lent is over. And if you haven't been observing

Lent, now is a good time to start! God does not consider a practice for half of Lent any less than a practice for all of Lent. All God desires is that our hearts lean towards him, and that our lives show his love in how we treat one another.

Amen.