



February 26, 2025
A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

This past week, I heard someone share a familiar story I've unfortunately heard many times.

"My husband still associates church with 'the place you go to be told how bad you are.'"

Regardless of whether this was your story, the pervasive narrative of shame perpetuated in many Christian churches has woven itself into lots of places in our culture.

Especially in the Season of Lent.

Next Wednesday, March 5th, marks the beginning of the 2025 Season of Lent. These 40 days (not counting Sundays) leading up to the celebration of Easter were originally intended to be a final season of preparation for those ready to convert to Christianity and join the church and be baptized.



In those early days (3rd century CE), this was a serious commitment. People prepared for this decision for three years, being formed in the practices of prayer and faithful living.

The hope was that through strong relationships in the community, extensive prayer and study of Scripture, and a deepening of their own relationship with God, they would be truly ready to make a lifelong commitment as followers of Jesus Christ and full participants in the Beloved Community of the church.

Even as the expectations for membership became more relaxed over time, Lent has remained a time for inner reflection and preparation. Starting with Ash Wednesday, it is a

time for all of us, collectively, to remember our own fragility and vulnerability in this world. (“From dust you have come, to dust you shall return.”)

The ritual of marking ourselves with the ashes of last year’s palms from Palm Sunday creates a space to consider our role as Christians in the world, and how God may be calling us from the ashes to respond in days like these.



Over the years, Lent has also become associated with practices of deprivation, fasting, or penitence. (Likewise, our siblings in the Muslim faith will enter their own season of fasting as Ramadan begins on Friday).

While the intent of these practices was originally to create more space for prayer and connection to God, for some Christians,

the “giving up something for Lent” ritual has become more about giving up the “vices” than spending time connecting with who God says that we already are.

Lent is not about shame.

One of the things I always appreciated about the theology of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was its emphasis on grace.

Wesley knew we needed to be honest about the reality of our own lives and the state of our world. This was of utmost importance to him. He also knew that forgiveness, grace, and awakening to God’s love for us were the foundations for these conversations.

Lent is a time to become more fully *awake* to God’s work in the world and in our own lives.

Our Christian story begins with a God who created all of us in goodness and grace. We were made for loving relationships — with God, with one another, and with all of creation.

As we become *awake* to our belonging in God’s beloved community and sit in the presence of God’s grace and forgiveness, we begin to realize not how *bad* we are, but how *loved* we are.

Lent gives us space to wrestle and engage in the work of theological reflection *as a community*, as we sit with the painful reality of the gap that exists between the goodness of creation and the reality of our current predicament.

Lent is about coming face to face with our reality.

Not with shame.

But with honesty.

Allowing ourselves the space to grieve and lament how far we are from the beloved community God intended.

Lament was a key practice that we see show up in the ancestors of our faith. Last week, in chapter 3 of Jonah, we saw the Ninevites put on sackcloth, a sign of humility and grief, as they came before God to acknowledge the harm that they had participated in and to ask for forgiveness.

This wasn't about shame.

It was about honesty. Grieving what could have been different.

Seeking God's guidance and insight on how we work together to live differently in the future.

This Lenten Season at HUMC, we will practice lament together using the book of Lamentations.

We will name the gap between the world God intended and the lived day-to-day reality of suffering and struggle.

We will grieve the impact it has made on the lives of so many, and the overall life and sustainability of our planet.

We will not grieve out of shame, but out of love — for God, for each other, and for the relationships and roles that we know are broken.

We will also be using our newly adopted **United Methodist Social Principles**, reading the words of theological reflection from our siblings across the denomination.

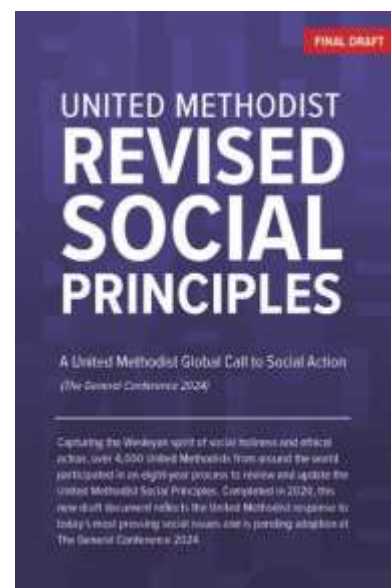
(<https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/what-we-believe/our-social-positions>)

They are words of guidance around our climate crisis, global poverty, immigration, and social injustice. Words of lament, but also words of what remains possible.

God, where are you speaking?

This will not be about giving up more or feeling obligated to do more.

This will be a season of *listening* and *telling the truth*.



Listening with our broken hearts, to the God of grace and forgiveness, who even in these trying times keeps whispering to us...

Beloved ones, you are forgiven.

Behold, I am doing a new thing... even out of the ashes.

Friends, I hope you will join us next Wednesday, March 5th, at either 7am or 6:30pm in the Sanctuary for our special Ash Wednesday services to start off the Lenten Season. (No livestream.)

We'll share with you our new booklet for Lent, and we will mark ourselves with the ashes on our forehead in the sign of the cross, not for shame but for our broken hearts to be opened wider to the grace of God who is nudging us forward.

April



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