

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near.” I find the passage from Joel a great way to begin Lent. I love the idea of the call to attention with the trumpet – the reminder to the people that the day of the Lord is coming. For us, it reminds us that Lent has begun – a time to repent and intentionally turn back to God. The prophet continues, “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.”

These words of Joel draw me into my Lenten disciplines which hopefully will help me turn to God more fully and intentionally than I have done recently. My Lenten disciplines tend to be personal – a different prayer practice, more meditation, trying to be kinder or taking a break from whatever game on the cell phone I have most recently gotten caught up with. Therefore, commentator, Rolf Jacobsen<sup>1</sup>, surprised me when he noted the following about Joel’s call to repentance. “Unlike the prophets Amos, Micah, or Isaiah, Joel did not emphasize repentance as turning away from evil and toward a life of justice. Rather, Joel emphasized repentance as turning to the Lord in worship: “Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly” (2:15).”

Very different from the usual interpretation of our Lenten disciplines. What would it be like to be called together for repentance as a people, as a congregation, as a denomination or as a county? One of my colleagues in her Ash Wednesday sermon pointed out that the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church along with other Christian leaders are doing just that in this Season of Lent in 2020 by calling us to a time of prayer, fasting and repentance out of concern for our country. Bishop Curry says “Our appeal comes during a time of profound division and genuine crisis of national character. This is not a matter of party or partisanship, but of deep concern for the soul of America.”

The prophet Joel believed that there is connection between worship rituals and genuine repentance - a link between "rending your heart" and "gathering the people." Bishop Curry and the other leaders believe that prayer, fasting, repentance, are ways of interceding with God on behalf of our nation and the world and so inviting us to gather – in many ways to worship together through praying, fasting and repenting – in this time of crisis. I want you to hear a short recording of Bishop Curry about this call, but first some words on prayer, fasting and repentance.

**Prayer** - Prayer calls us to give up control. In prayer, we ask to love God and love our neighbor, to ask for release from what separates us from those neighbors we have forgotten how to love whether they are near or far.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=256](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=256)

**Fasting** - Fasting calls us to redirect our attention. The call is to fast on Wednesdays during Lent beginning today. Fasting weekly can help us to stop, pay attention, wake up, interrupt our schedules, go deeper, and listen for God and the Holy Spirit in ways that might lead us to new places in our hearts and minds. Fasting doesn't have to be just from food. If food fasting is a problem for you whether it be your health, your work, or your situation, think about what else could you fast from. Facebook, TV, checking your phone? What could you take time away from that might leave an empty space in your soul for God to enter in?

**Repentance** - Repentance calls us to change our hearts. It's much more than shame or guilt and feeling sorry; it means to stop, turn around, and go in a whole new direction. With prayer and fasting, what new direction could we be invited to?

Let us pause in silence and then listen to Bishop Curry— listen to what you might be called to this Lent. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPbruXS9490>

The trumpet has sounded. The invitation has been issued. How will you respond?

I will be praying for our country. I will pray the prayer Bishop Curry ended with every day during Lent that can be found in the Book of Common Prayer on page . I will fast on Wednesday mornings during Lent. I struggle with fasting, so a morning which might be easy for many, will be hard for me. I will also be listening to how I am being called to be a Christian leader in this divided world.

I will support anyone else who want to answer this call with me, and I ask you to pray for me and I will pray for you. Amen