



FAITH matters

March 6, 2023

I have the habit of seeing much of the Christian life as music played out in the rhythm and cadence of the Church liturgical calendar and in God-revealing nature, where our annual celebrations of seasons, birthdays, Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter arise like a favorite song. Who doesn't thrill to the first bird calls of Spring? To the organ playing a most-loved hymn?

We have just entered the 40-day season of Lent, when the lengthening days of Spring lead up to Jesus' arrest, sham trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Lent isn't actually biblical, but it is a natural season in which Christians around the world choose to confront their lives by entering the wilderness of their own shortcomings and sins to pray and fast, to confess and turn.

Lent is for lament. It is a time for considering the poverty of our own spirit, and for mourning the sin we find there. It is a time to sorrow over the sins of this world, and the millions of people who do not know Christ. We pray and weep over all the people who mock and reject the very God that would save them. Lent is for laying aside the things we indulge in that keep us from God; a time for a truly contrite heart that confesses its idolatry and apathy and pride. The music of such a time is somber like quiet tears that stain your cheeks when you cry in silence, moody and mournful like the hymn, *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*. I am sorrowfully reminded of my own complicity in Christ's suffering.

Lent is also a time to embrace the Bible's repeated call to return to God. To turn. To turn back when we get to the coda that tells us to begin anew, and carefully consider our life by secreting ourselves in Scripture study and prayer. We ask God to search us, to reveal our grievous ways, and to reconcile our hearts to the love and obedience and practices of the Church. The turning is, like Christ's love itself, both patient and kind, like God tapping us on the back of the shoulder then gently turning us around to face him. Now the music begins its crescendo at the crossroads between despair and hope. From sad to glad. From empty to filled. It is truly heart-warming.

Lent climbs through Holy Week, not unlike the physical climb to the temple in

Jerusalem. The climax is in Christ's resurrection. For me, Easter is the biggest and brightest and loftiest day of the year. We have looked down into the pit and seen our sin. We have repented and turned in love and obedience to embrace the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ his Son. And now? Now we celebrate Christ's victory over our sin. Over all sin. And the music is gloriously triumphant! Even as I write I thrill to hear in my mind *Thine be the Glory* because Christ's victory truly is endless.

Lent is a season of ups and downs, in descent and ascent like music with varied tempo, timbre and volume. Yes, it brings the need for self-honesty and contrite correction in mid-course, for somberly looking ahead to Christ's terrible suffering in our place, and for turning back after keeping God at our back. But, more importantly I think, it gives us the sense of the cross of Christ being imprinted on our hearts. And when that happens, we can sing together with abandon because of what Christ has accomplished! What wondrous love! So, I am looking forward to singing with all of you at Easter!

~Written by Julie Walton



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