

Lent, the season in which the church has called itself to practice of self-denial and abstinence, is upon us again. I have found struggle this year as we prepare for our second Lent in this pandemic. In every other year, I would be calling us to what we can remove from or add to our lives so that we may draw closer to God. We've already done this for an entire year, what more could we possibly give up? With so many people who've died in this pandemic, the pain in our communities, why would we want to hear the words, "remember you are from dust and to dust you shall return." Haven't we all been doing everything we can to keep ourselves, and those we love from becoming dust. And yet, Lent calls us to remember that we are from dust. But what if we've missed a step. Instead of focusing on our mortality we explore our humanity?

We are human. We can adapt to our surroundings but it takes a great deal of time and energy. This week has found us trying to adapt our homes and lives to extended time below freezing. Our homes were not designed for this. Our homes on the Gulf Coast are designed to help us withstand hurricane force winds and brutal heat. Our tires don't have studs in them to keep from skidding on ice. Our wardrobes don't have enough layers to keep us comfortable outside. What happens when we accept the limits that we are not configured to keep on with everything else when the world around us changes?

This year for Lent, we are doing something different. When Lent is counted, it's 40 days not including Sundays. Why? Sundays are considered little Easters and they are not about the self-denial & abstinence. So each Sunday of Lent, we will examine one of the I Am statements Jesus makes in the Gospel of John. It just so happens that there are 7, one for each Sunday

between now and Easter morning. So we begin with Jesus telling the disciples, after having washed their feet that he is about to leave. We know this passage. For many of us it's what we turn to when life is hard. Jesus explains that he is going to leave and prepare a place for us. And yet, Thomas, one of the 12 does not understand what is happening. And Jesus' response to Thomas is that he is The Way, The Truth and The Life.

It seems so easy and yet we know this to be hard. We want so much to do the right thing, to say the right thing, to think the right thing that we continually push and pull with Jesus on what is or isn't our job. I sometimes think we all may be toddlers insisting on doing it our way when we don't really even know what the task before us is. And when it doesn't work and something is broken we get mad that no one stopped us before we made it worse. It is in this moment that Jesus speaks the words, to those who should have already known, that he is The Way, The Truth and The Life. This isn't a judgment against the disciples that they should've known better but a gentle reminder that we do this over and over and over again.

What happens when we allow ourselves to stop insisting on doing it our way and instead do it God's way? The way that Jesus shows us is filled with humble service. The truth that Jesus shows us is love. The life that Jesus gives us is never ending. We cannot do all the things all the time. What we can do is our part and trust that God through others can handle the rest. A little more than a year ago a new Star Wars series debuted call The Mandalorian. The story of Mando, a bounty hunter who searches for "The Child" who turns out to be a baby of the Yoda species. Mando adhered to a code to which all Mandalorians live which required them to wear a

helmet at all times and to protect each other. Whenever they did that they would say, “This is the Way.”

What is The Way that Jesus gives us? Love. Love of God and love of neighbor. This is the way. We spent the last 5 weeks looking at sharing God’s love and find ourselves right back to that fundamental truth – God is love and calls us to love in return. So how do we love in our imperfectly human way.

We are mindful – sometimes the best way to show love is being aware of where we are. When I have not had a good night sleep or my coffee in the morning, I am not the kindest person in the world. I have a tendency to raise my voice and be impatient. Being aware that is my tendency I can choose to respond in a different way or stay clear of people until I am in a better mood.

We are approachable. We work to have our words and actions match we become authentic and trustworthy which allows others to come to us. Being approachable also means to reaching out to others who may not be our first stop.

We are graceful. Not in the opposite of clumsy graceful but being full of grace and blessing for others and ourselves. When we are filled with God’s grace we are less judgmental which changes relationships.

We are bold. We are focused on living as God calls us to live instead of the way the world calls us to do. We dance like no one is watching and love the same way.

We are self-giving. We give of what we have being invested of the well-being of others. We see parents giving up wants to supply children's needs. We see it in teachers who go above and beyond so that their classroom & children have everything they need to succeed. When we live in this way the world changes.

Jesus is The Way, The Truth & The Life. When we live Jesus' way our lives are transformed and others experience the truth of the Gospel. May we give ourselves grace to live into The Way knowing that we cannot do it alone but together. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.