

Rev. Jennifer Peters McCurry
Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Bellevue, PA
February 17, 2010 • Ash Wednesday C
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Today begins the season of Lent. It's a time when we Christians enter into a special time of disciplines. We return to the roots of our faith practices. We remember what it means to be washed and forgiven. We remember what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

There is no season of Lent in the Bible. That is something that the church developed after the times described in scripture. There are many, many texts in the Bible that speak to us about what it means to be disciples – every day of our lives.

Our gospel passage today reminds us of some of the practices of discipleship. There are a spectrum of practices that reflect our faith, or our “piety,” as appears in our gospel. They include: praying, worshiping, serving others, sharing our possessions, advocating for justice, reading the Bible, serving as peacemakers, sharing God's love with others.

There is a public component of all of them, since our faith affects our relationships. We pray for our neighbors. We worship with other people. We give

money and belongings to those in need. We serve one another. We read and discuss the Bible together, in classes and in worship.

Even though our faith involves other people, Matthew tells us that we need to practice our faith with blinders on. That doesn't mean that we can be Christians who are locked in our rooms. Our faith calls us to be in relationships with others. And those relationships should be characterized by love, generosity, interdependence, gratitude.

Our piety and our lives of faith need to be centered on God. Even though it is difficult, God calls us to be focused on Christ when we pray and worship and share ourselves and our belongings – and do anything else that is in response to our faith. In other parts of our lives, we have to be aware of our status in the world. We need to tend to what other people think in our relationships at work and school and in our families.

When it comes to the central practices of our Christian faith, it's not about where we stand with others around us. It's not about the treasures that we collect on earth. Other benefits like social status or public affirmation are not the point. Being a follower of Jesus is enough. There are eternal blessings, here and now, that we receive. The Spirit's loving presence is in our lives. We receive unsurpassable strength and peace and hope, at times when we need them most. Our difficult life

choices may be clearer, because we know what is important to us. God calls us to ministries and ways of serving, which are some times surprising. We grow in understanding of God, and community, and one another.

These are treasures that neither moth nor rust consumes, and thieves cannot steal them. Treasures that we need for our lives now, which will bless us eternally. Treasures that Christ brings us through his presence in Word and Sacrament, and in the body that is the Church.