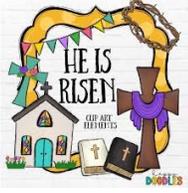


IMMANUEL'S INSIGHTS



FROM THE *Pastor's Desk*



Dear friends in Christ,

The gospels tell us that the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus at his baptism looking like a dove. But Mark tells us that the dovish Holy Spirit turned hawkish as it drove Jesus out into the desert. Matthew says that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. The desert (or wilderness) is a place of solitude and silence. Jesus went there to fast and pray and to prepare for his mission which would lead him ultimately to the cross.

Christians have observed a season of Lent for centuries as a metaphor for following Jesus into the desert as means of focusing ourselves on our call to carry the cross with Jesus. Jesus called us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him. (Luke 9:23) We naturally like to focus on the Epiphany revelations and the Easter resurrections. But Lent calls us to recognize that we are sinners who must deny ourselves and even suffer in the spiritual battles against the devil, the world, and our sinful selves.

Lent calls us to follow Jesus into the desert by taking up spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are practices that make space in our hearts for the Word of God. They are attempts to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly as in Colossians 3:16. They may have some emotional and mental benefit, but the real purpose is to hear and receive the Word of God which is the power of salvation.

Solitude and silence are the most basic spiritual disciplines. They are a form of fasting that is extremely challenging for most of us. We live in a world bombarded with stimuli like never before. We are addicted to noise, to hurry, to phones, to the internet, to someone else (besides God) guiding our thoughts. To unplug from the world and to quiet ourselves can be very difficult for us. That is why Lent is not 20 minutes long. It takes us quite a while to quiet our busy minds so that we can hear ourselves think and so that we can truly pray and attend to God's Word.

Whatever you do this Lent, I would encourage you to make time for silence and solitude. Take a walk. Memorize a favorite passage of Scripture and recite it to yourself every day and see what those words begin to say to you. I promise you that the dynamic Word of God will speak to you in new and fresh ways as you take time to let it work through the layers of resistance that we build up.

Corporate spiritual disciplines are those that we do together such as worship and Bible study. I want to remind you that everyone is always welcome to join our adult Bible class on Sunday mornings from 10:15 to 11:00. We are currently reading through 2 Peter, but you don't have to know a thing about 2 Peter to enjoy the class. Each week is a different conversation that assumes no prior knowledge. It is just an opportunity to sit with Scripture and see where it takes us. I always look forward to seeing where the Word will take us each week.

I am grateful for the call of Lent to slow down, let go, and listen to God's Word.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen