

The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia
Adult Formation in Faith

Preparing for Easter

When asked, “What’s Easter about?” one might hear this response: “The death and resurrection of Jesus.” Of course there’s truth in that response. The difficulty with it is this: it can lead us to imagine that we are celebrating something significant from the past because, well, that’s what Christians do. How the keeping of Easter shapes our lives today can be easily overlooked.

A more challenging response is this: **Easter asks each of us how we will live as disciples of the crucified and risen Christ in daily life.** What will guide us in the weeks and months ahead? How will we embody the life of the Risen One day in and day out?

The answer to that significant question is found in the Baptismal Covenant that rests at the heart of the Easter liturgies. Here we discover what some call our Rule of Life: those convictions and practices that shape our thinking, praying, relationships, work, and hopes for ourselves, our parish, our families, and the world in which we live.



As we prepare to celebrate the awesome liturgies in which we encounter the vivid Presence of the Holy Three, let’s consider what the Covenant both offers us and asks of us ...

Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ? This simple question asks us to recognize the presence of evil in the world: evil as that force which diminishes, distorts, and degrades life; evil as that which hungers for power over others and seeks to dominate. And in recognizing the presence of evil, that power which also affects us, to reject it as a way of life. At the same time,

the Covenant asks us to turn to Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God’s desire that all creation experience life, health, and wholeness – what the scriptures refer to as “salvation” – and renew our commitment to follow in his Way.

Do you believe in God the Father ... in Jesus Christ, the Son of God ... in God the Holy Spirit? The word “believe” is rooted in the Germanic *galaubjan* which means “to love,” “to trust.” The Creed is not a list of propositions that ask for our intellectual assent but rather a baptismal confession concerning the God worshipped by Christians: a *communal* God marked by *diversity*. Through Holy Baptism, each of us is welcomed into the asymmetrical life of our communal God and the life of the community we call the Body of Christ. The English anchorite, Julian of Norwich, quoted the Blessed Trinity in this manner: *I am the power and the Goodness of the Father, I am the Wisdom of the Mother, I am the Light and the Grace which is blessed Love, I am the Trinity, I am the Unity, I am the supreme Goodness of all things.* In confessing the Creed, we are invited to renew our love for the Three who create anew, bestow wholeness, and inspire all goodness in life.

Jesus taught that **love of God and love of neighbor** are inseparable, no different than breathing in and breathing out. What, then, flows from our love of God and our life in God, a life sustained by daily prayer, listening for God’s voice in Scripture, welcoming preaching, receiving the sacraments, singing, contemplating sacred art, and worshipping with other Christians?

Continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. This is a quotation of Acts 2:42, a description of the Christian community immediately after Pentecost. Our relationship with God and others is nurtured in the Holy Eucharist and the Daily Office. At the same time, our liturgies orient us toward life with others in daily life. *How have you experienced this orientation toward others in the words or actions of worship?*

Persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord. Does the daily news not make clear the presence of evil in our world? And as fallible beings, are we not harmful at times to ourselves and others? To repent means to “change one’s heart,” confident that the Spirit will give us the strength to do so. *What do you think calls out for resistance? For what change of heart do you pray in this Easter season of mercy and hope?*

Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. Should we write this one out and place it on the refrigerator door or bathroom mirror? It is a challenging vow we make: that our words and actions are *good news*, rather than bad news, for those with whom we live and work. As we arise each day, we rightly ask: *How will my living this day embody the good news of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness in a world that experiences little of it?*



Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself. Note that this vow says “all persons,” not “some persons” or “persons who think and act as I do.” There are some Christian groups that speak loudly of love for others but only those who fit their narrow measurement of who the neighbor should be. Not for us! This vow pushes us to see beyond our own needs to those of others, especially those who need allies and advocates. *Who calls out for your loving action?*

Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. Let’s be clear that charity meets an immediate need: feeding the hungry on our streets, giving shelter to the homeless. All good and all needed. The call for justice, however, asks why charity is needed in the first place: What needs to be reformed in our society so that no one fears hunger, no one is houseless, all have access to healthcare? This is a challenge for many Christians who hesitate to engage in political action. But, then, *do we want to be charged with complacency, with sanctioning the grinding poverty that diminishes and degrades the God-given dignity of all?*

Cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation. In light of the environmental crisis that affects all earth’s people and other creatures, this vow asks that we do what we can to restore God’s creation befouled by human folly and hunger for profit. We live in a strikingly beautiful region yet its beauty is marred by lost tree canopies, superfund sites, and overdevelopment. *How might we join and support alliances that are working diligently to protect God’s gift of land, air, water, and other species? Should we not elect public servants who share this mission to protect and restore?*

The Baptismal Covenant of *The Book of Common Prayer 1979* was and remains a revolutionary liturgy in that it moves us away from a clubby church of like-minded people to a community whose mission is a public one that shapes what it means to be Christian. Here we see the intrinsic relationship between liturgy and mission, sacrament and social action, worship and work. May your reflection on the Covenant bear much fruit in the weeks ahead. – Fr. Samuel Torvend