

The Colors of Lent: purple, pink, black and white.

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Like most people, I am a very visual person. I notice the changing of seasons by the color of my surroundings. Winter is marked by stark gray trees, pale blue skies, and the occasional white of snow and ice. The coming of spring is marked by the growth of yellow daffodils, red tulips, and bright green grass. The church, in her wisdom, also marks the changing of the liturgical seasons by changing colors. Lent is no exception to this rule.

Lent is marked, in order, by black, purple, pink, white, black, and white. Granted, not every congregation observes these changing colors, but I personally think it is a lost opportunity when they do not. Each color in the Christian Liturgical season has a purpose and a meaning. Once one understands the meaning of the colors, marking the change of the seasons, and growing a deeper faith becomes easier.

The first color to mark Lent is black. Black is the color of death or mourning. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is the day we remember that from ashes we come and to ashes we will return. We, frail, sinful humans, are here only by the grace of God. Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to renew our faith as we die to our old lives, place our sins and our sinful nature on the alter to God, and strive to live lives dedicated and focused to God's call on our lives. It is the time of beginning a new covenant to seek God instead of seeking the distractions that keep us from God. We die a little death in order to have a better life.

Lent, the next 46 days, is marked by Purple, a color symbolizing a period of repentance and preparation. During Lent, we repent of our sins and failings, and we prepare ourselves for the death and resurrection of Christ. The act of repentance is two fold; it is inward and outward. The inward requires us to examine our faith, our thoughts and our desires in order to seek those ideas and feelings in which we have failed to embody Christ in our lives. The outward requires us to sacrifice of our selves, our time, and our personal resources in order to seek justice and the manifestation of the kingdom of Christ on this earth. It is an audacious goal, but one that we must seek.

Pink is a color of joy. It is the churches way of saying "hang in there, you're half way there." Pink marks the Sunday that is half of the way through the season of Lent. It is designed to both encourage and admonish. It encourages us in our endeavors that we have accomplished so far, and admonishes us to keep going and not to falter. We are half way there, but that also means we only have half the time to complete the task set before us.

White has several meanings, but for the season of lent, it stands for holiness. White makes its first appearance during lent on Maundy Thursday. Maundy Thursday marks the last meal and first communion of Christ. It is an opportunity to mark the beginning of an everlasting communion, and the beginning of the series of events that would lead to

the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a meal and a moment forever set aside that binds all believers past, present, and future into communion with one another, a Holy moment.

However, what begins in white, ends with black. Maundy Thursday ends with every vestment, every piece of color, every holy relic removed or covered in black. We go from a holy time to a time of mourning as we mark the crucifixion, death and burial of Christ. The church, when we leave it on Thursday night, becomes an embodiment of the tomb. We are bereft of light and life. We, every Christian and every church, die with Christ.

Yet, Easter Sunday morning comes, and with it resurrection! The church is covered in white, the color that now stands not only for holiness but also of joy, purity, innocence and triumph! Christ is resurrected, and through Christ's resurrection, we too are resurrected. We are made pure by Christ's sacrifice, we are made innocent in God's eyes, and we have triumphed over sin and death. Easter is here! Shout Hallelujah and bask in the glory of God!

And I bet you thought that the colors that we put on the alter were just for decoration.

God's blessings,

Mel Hansen-Holloway.