

Lent 1: Ramadan, Lunar New Year, and Lent

- An auspicious time to reflect



Matthew 4:1-11

Psalm 32

Lent is a time of self-examination, re-commitment to our values, and preparation for the next year. We Christians do this for 40 days, and 6 Sundays, before Easter.

Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon in the spring equinox. Now, paper calendars and the lunar and solar calendars don't match up. Turtle teaches 13 months. The moon teaches 13 months. But the solar year – winter to winter – which follows the sun, is more like 12 months. So March 21st was set as the "rough" official equinox... even if it isn't. That means Easter then happens March 21st up to a lunar month later. There's debate on what counts as the full moon too - as you know, sometimes the moon looks fullest on two nights, or in the day. So that was set to

14.75 days from the last new moon. All this crazy math means that the Easter pattern of what date Easter will be doesn't repeat for over 5 million years. So the same happens for Ash Wednesday.

This year, it just so happens multiple religions are beginning their time of self-examination, re-commitment to values, and preparation for the next year together.

Ash Wednesday was also the start of Ramadan for Muslims. Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims who are healthy fast from sunup to sundown; and everyone prays together, reflects, gives to charity, and joins together as a community. During the 29 or 30 days of Ramadan, God revealed the Quran to the Prophet Mohammad. In this holy time whatever sin is done is multiplied against the sinner. Whatever charity and good is done is multiplied towards the one doing such. So people try quite hard to be good and realign their lives with God's will! Islamic calendars are 12 months, with each month being one crescent moon to the next. Which means the months wander across seasons as the solar year is 13 moons. Ramadan began on Ash Wednesday this year, but will begin more or less 10 days earlier next year, and 10 days earlier still in 2 years, and so forth.

That means its pretty unlikely for Lent and Ramadan to start together.

But the amazing correlation of preparation time doesn't end with just Muslims and Christians.

This Wednesday was the start of the Chinese Lunar New Year -- which is more than China, by the way. This calendar begins on the winter solstice in December, and runs for 12 or 13 lunar months, and then begins again on the winter solstice. Other lunar-solar calendars may calculate it a bit differently. Like Lent, and like Ramadan, the Lunar New Year is a time to recommit to our values, prepare for the next year, and self-examine. It is observed by gathering with family, honouring and remembering ancestors, and investing in the community. Like Christians in Lent, like Muslims in Ramadan, those observing the Lunar New Year give charitably to charities and those in need.

At this point, I have mentioned over half of the world's population is now in a time of charity, goodwill, prayer, and kindness.

And we're not done yet. Wednesdays was ALSO the start of Mkwā Giizis, the Bear Moon. Mkwā Giizis is observed among Anishinaabe with reflection, dreaming, seeking to perceive beyond the physical and into the spiritual, and preparing spiritually to receive clarity. Like Bear, we know rest and stillness is required before the growth that awaits us and spring ahead.

Together - all these peoples and traditions, faiths and cultures - together we enter a set aside time, a sacred time, to be better people.

I am certain I have missed other religions and cultures, traditions and faiths. Right now, most of the world is committed to being better, doing better, being kind, and encouraging charity, peace, and spiritual renewal.

We know how much is wrong right now. How much ache and pain. How much hunger and misery. We know how injustice and hate of every kind is trying to take over the world.

But right now, most of the world is resisting.

Right now, literally billions of people are doing charity, being kinder, and praying for goodness. Billions are making the time in their busy schedules to still, quiet, and listen to the Spiritual. To invite the Divine to communicate. To awaken their connection to how large and grand Creation is and how we're a little part of this beautiful symphony.

Can you feel the power of so many souls united in kindness?

What wonder God is working.

What goodness God and we are creating.

What hope springs anew.

I want to share with you the words of Jan Richardson (Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons)

Blessing the Dust

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners
or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial -

do you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the first,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

God bless you, and all the world, as we
gather our dust, offer it to God, and trust the
one who made the galaxies and our bones,
the stars and the soil, our breath and the
breath of all life – trust that One can do
wonders. And is doing wonders.

Amen.



Matthew 4: 1-11 NRSV Ue

The Testing of Jesus

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’ ”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Psalm 32 VU pg. 759

Refrain: Be glad in God you righteous. Rejoice, O saints, rejoice.

Blessed are those whose offences are forgiven, whose sin has been put away.

**Blessed are those to whom God imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit. Refrain.**

When I kept silence, my body wasted away, while I groaned all the day long.

**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my strength dried up as in a summer drought.**

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I did not hide.

I said: “I will confess my sins to God”; and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let all the faithful pray to you in time of trouble;

when great floodwaters rises, it shall not come near them.

You are a hiding place for me, you will preserve me from trouble;
you will surround me with shouts of deliverance. Refrain

I will teach you, and guide you in the way you should go.

I will keep you under my eye and instruct you.

Be not like a horse or mule, without understanding,

whose course must be checked with bit and bridle.

Many pains are in store for the wicked,

but whoever trusts in God, is surrounded by steadfast love. Refrain



May God’s spirit shape our understanding of these words.
And may they awaken in our hearts