

It struck me recently—never before has the liturgical season of Lent and the observation of Holy Week been so deeply aligned with my actual life. Lent and Holy Week aren't abstractions this year, not just events in the past that I'm reading about and commemorating. They feel very real to me, like I'm living through them myself.

Lent is a time of spiritual practice that prepares us for Holy Week and Easter. More specifically, our Lenten practices prepare us for the death that we know is coming in Holy Week. We enter Holy Week with faith that new life will resurrect after death, on Easter. But only after death. We must move through the time of death to get to the new life. And that's what our Lenten practices prepare us to do.

Throughout our season of Lent this year, we've been living through the global Covid-19 pandemic. At the beginning of Lent, we may have hoped this virus would remain in other parts of the world, that it wouldn't get too close to us, that not too many people would get sick and die, that it wouldn't disrupt our lives too much or for too long.

But as Lent now turns to Holy Week, our hopes have changed dramatically. We now acknowledge how deadly serious we must take this situation we're in. We acknowledge that how we live is now a matter of life and death, for ourselves, for those we love, for everyone.

Lent has been for us this year a season of actual practice, preparation, and learning—which is exactly what Lent is supposed to be. We've spent the season of Lent learning how to practice giving up much of what we consider normal. How to practice physical-distancing and sheltering-in-place. How to adjust to all the inconveniences and disruptions in our lives. How to live constantly and harmoniously in close proximity with others, or all by ourselves. How to get our needs met, and how to help others in need. How to relate to all of our thoughts and feelings about what's happening. How to draw more deeply than usual from our spiritual practices and faith. How to be the Body of Christ together while keeping our bodies physically apart.

These have all been our Lenten practices this year.

And now, with all the lessons we've learned from our weeks of Lenten practice and preparation, we're now entering Holy Week together. And things are about to get far more intense, just as they do in the Holy Week story. If you look at the graphs projecting when the virus will peak in Texas, we're a week or more away, which means we've not yet experienced its full impact. In the next several weeks, the reality of death will become far more real to us. Death will come closer to us, we're going to feel it more deeply—which is precisely what Holy Week is all about.

Thank God we've been practicing and preparing throughout Lent for what's about to hit us in Holy Week, and in the weeks to come. And thank God many of us have been practicing, preparing, and learning for years, some of us for most of our lives, as Christ's disciples, for what's about to come.

As we enter Holy Week, now's the time to use everything we've ever learned from Jesus Christ, from all of our spiritual ancestors, from all of our spiritual mentors and teachers, to help us face together what's coming. Now's the time for us to draw every ounce of spiritual strength and resilience we can muster from every spiritual practice we've ever practiced. Now's the time to bless the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love, and to put that love into action by reaching out every day to other members of our church, and to do whatever we can to minister to the most vulnerable in our community and world.

This year, we're entering Holy Week together in a way we've never entered Holy Week before, in way that'll seem far more real than it has before. And there's no way around it, there's only a way through it. And for us, the way through it is with everything we've ever practiced,

prepared for, and learned as Christ's disciples.

I have confidence in us, I have faith in us, because I know that we've practiced and prepared well, and we've learned all we need to know from Jesus Christ. We know how to love God, how to love and care for our neighbor, and how to love and care for ourselves.

May God bless us, and keep us, and guide us through Holy Week, and through the weeks to come. May God lead us through Holy Week to that time when we celebrate life resurrected.

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