Leap of Faith 2017 Intro

We like Lent around here. And we do a thing called Leap of Faith: A Lenten Experience. Booklets on table and in weekly update. Lent is 40 days leading up to Easter, resurrection bash. Spiritual retreat season for Christianity. Introduce a few spiritual practices that refresh-focus our God connection. More in a bit.

But first: Lent is part Church Calendar. Think of it as an alternate approach to seasons. Starts in late Nov. not Jan 1 with Advent, four weeks before Christmas which is 12 days long, some in between weeks, then Lent, which starts on Wednesday (Ash Wednesday service imposition of ashes) leads to Easter which is a season too—50 days later, Pentecost (Spirit Day) then back to some in-between weeks until Advent again. Cycle repeats.

Church calendar is not a Hallmark scheme to sell Christian bling or to make uninitiated feel stupid. Church Calendar has its roots in the strategy of an oppressed people, ancient Israel, to resist rhythms of life imposed on them by their oppressors. To give them space for rest reflection, remembrance, celebration, and joy.

Alternate calendar with alternate rhythms to promote an alternate lifestyle to the dominant culture when it becomes oppressive.

Our reading form Exodus has echoes of this alternate approach to marking time. Moses up on the mountain and cloud of divine presence overshadows for 6 days, on 7th day God calls to Moses. 7th day was centerpiece of Israel’s alternate calendar: Sabbath day, day of rest. They had spent previous 400 years as slaves in Egypt. Now they are coming out of slavery and the slave mentality. Receiving a day of rest each week is a mark of freedom. While they are decompressing from 400 yrs of slavery on way to a new land, God gives them a year’s worth of seasons-celebrations. Reading mentions 40 days on the mountain with God---that’s a precursor to 40 days of Lent, which are meant to be a time to reconnect with this God who is all about resistance to Empire and ushering in freedom.

Book of Exodus first complied in Israel a millennium later when Israel was coming out of a different exile. They had been overrun in Palestine by another empire—raped-pillaged and sent into exile in Babylon. Were forced to adapt to Babylonian approach to days-
seasons. (Our modern seven-day week, and 12 months based on lunar cycle are derived from Babylonian calendar.)

Jews understood: Babylonian system of marking time was part of their attempt to dominate Israel’s psyche. Days of week named after sun, moon, stars, conceived of as gods: Sun-sun; Mon.-moon; Tues-Mars; Wed-Mercury; Th. -Jupiter; Fri-Venus; Saturday-Saturn.

Imagine you are Jewish woman who grew up a Jewish community in NYC. You move to A2, but you get a job at Zingerman’s, founded as a word-class Jewish deli. You lose your job and you are forced to move, of all places to Frankenmuth, German town. Only job you can get is at Bronners, World’s Largest Year-Round Christmas Store. No bagels, lox, gefilte fish in a hundred miles! Go home, fall into bed and wake with Jingle Bell Rock looping in your brain.

**Oppression of authoritarian regimes has a mental component**

Gentiles think of the Torah, Law of Israel, as odious thing. But to the Jews, Torah is a freedom manifesto. Centerpiece of Torah is Sabbath—take a day off to rest! And three times a year, special festivals, some a week long, involving pilgrimage to temple.

Whole idea of church calendar, drawn from experience of Israel: having an alternate calendar that travels to the beat of a different drum is part of resistance to oppressive powers over us.

Church calendar born in early Christian experience under the oppressive power of Roman Empire. Calendar followed life of Jesus from birth-to death-to resurrection to Spirit on all flesh. The church calendar was a counter-narrative to the divinization of the Roman Emperors—Caesars. They had their special birth narratives, stories of amazing exploits, all leading to their ascension to power. Emperors were called “Lord” and announcement of new Emperor was “proclamation of good news”—same phrase Christians used for proclaiming gospel.

Order of Sunday worship, the Eucharist/ Communion meals were mean to challenge Roman claim that Caesar was Lord. Christians adapted format of Roman symposia meals. Started with bread and food course served, then wine began to flow, but first there was blessing over the wine. Normally this blessing made in the name of Caesar or one of the Roman gods. Christians blessed wine in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, remembering that he was crucified—punishment reserved from insurrection against Rome.
The whole worship cycle—the church calendar, Sunday worship—served a resistance function: you may have some worldly power over me, and designs to get into my psyche, but your time is limited and you don’t have my mind and heart. These belong to Jesus who was crucified along with other enemies of Rome.

Many of you have remarked that our new national situation has had a negative-oppressive impact on psyche. Our new president has received more media coverage than any human being of past. News is all-Trump-all-the-Time. And we do need to pay attention to what’s going on around. No time to fall asleep at the switch. So whatever you do, keep on doing your citizen actions—our trans members, our Syrian refugees, immigrants, Muslim neighbors, anyone with minority status, need our active participation to resist what’s going down.

But we also need to carve out space to breathe and to remember whose kingdom we serve and whose path we intend to follow. We need to travel to the beat of a different, expose our souls to a different narrative, different rhythms.

So Lent is just in time, this year, just in time.

The African American social justice tradition has a lot to teach us about sustaining activism with a deep spiritual perspective. Black church has always seen spirituality as part of resistance strategy.

This lent our recommended book is by Howard Thurman, biggest spiritual influence on MLK: Jesus and the Disinherited: chapters on Jesus, as voice of the Disinherited; psychic battles that we face every day: hate, deception, anger, love.

If you are signed up for weekly updates you will receive a daily email with a simple prayer devotional. A daily set of prayers, short readings including words of Jesus and selections from Howard Thurman’s book. Use this to do some God-centering in your day. Morning-bedtime, whatever works for you.

PRAY FOR YOUR SIX

Take a week or two to identify six people (or less) who are just outside your normal daily awareness. So not family members or friends. Maybe a co-worker you’re not chums with, SB barista who knows you are the double-shot dry latte with soy and a shot of caramel, or even the homeless person you see at library.
Write their names-descriptions down and pray for them every day. Mention them to God, hold them up for a moment. Simple exercise in expanding our hearts a little beyond our comfort zone.

This year, you might make a point to include a few people who are part of targeted groups—the trans daughter of your friend, or Muslim mechanic who works on your car.

MY BIG ASK

Most challenging practice for most people. Identify something that you personally need, want, desire write it down and pray for it every day during lent. We’ve had some amazing answers to these prayers over the years, and of course, plenty of unanswered prayers as well. This is an exercise in vulnerability as much as anything. Asking for something personal, something that matters to us in very personal way, is harder than you think. Emily will talk more about that next Sunday, but start thinking about this one. Then just add it to your daily prayer.

OUR BIG ASK

This is something we join to pray for, again, as much as possible, a simple prayer offered daily. This year, it’s a simple prayer for joy in the middle of trouble or stress. Most of us feel like we’re 2 or 3 solved problems away from being happy. But what if we just said, before my 2 or 3 problems get solved, it would be nice to have more moments of joy in my everyday. Now.

Read prayer: “Lord, increase our joy in the midst of trouble. We release our fears and anxieties to you. Let your light shine in us and overflow through us. Amen!”

STAY FOR LUNCH AND MAKE REMINDER PRAYER BEADS
(beads to represent your six, your big ask, our big ask)
LEN TEN SIMPLE MEAL SMALL GROUP: See cards in back. Stand up if leading a group. Hosting Blue Ocean Easter Choir led by Crystal Harding, first of 3 rehearsals at my home, March 8.

ASH WEDNESDAY, GOOD FRIDAY, EASTER BAPTISM

Invited to join our friends at SC for their Ash Wednesday service. Starts at 7pm, lasts an hour and features “imposition of ashes”
Turns out that non-anxiously remembering your mortality with others is a freeing thing, the kind of step that opens our heart to God.
Good Friday is Friday before Easter and this year Emily had a great idea. Instead of the usual afternoon observance of the crucifixion, we’re going to have a service downtown, probably Federal building steps, to remember those who are currently being scapegoated: Muslim friends, sexual minorities, immigrants without papers, members of press, everyone on the wrong side of white supremacy like young black men. Not a protest, but outdoors, structured silence.

EASTER BASH & BAPTISM

LEAP OF FAITH LENTEN EXPERIENCE: INTRODUCTION

LENT: Begins Ash Wednesday, March 1 and runs for 40 days (not including Sundays) until Easter Sunday, April 16. A season of spiritual renewal, refreshment, refocus.

Featured book: *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman

Practices: Pray for Your Six, My Big Ask, Our Big Ask, Lenten Simple Meal Small Group