



Serving Christ and the community since 1731.

rhinebeckreformed.org

| 845.876.3727

| 6368 Mill Street, Rhinebeck, NY 12572

| rhinebeckreformed@frontiernet.net

PASTORAL LETTER – MARCH 2021

Dear friend,

Most of us may think of the church's liturgical season of Lent as a season of penance, somberness, introspection, and deprivation, like fasting. Lent is all of that. Lent invites us to think seriously about the suffering that Christ endured in order to save us on a cross. But, Lent can also be a time of celebration. Lent involves the advent of Spring—when we welcome signs of life—when things start to become green.

Nothing captures this point more poignantly than the holiday of St. Patrick's Day on March 17. I remember celebrating this holiday as a child in the inner city during Lent. Amid a sea of green humanity, I reveled in the sound of bagpipes filling the air during a parade, followed by chomping on soda bread and corned beef and cabbage.

What I have always admired about St. Patrick's Day is that everyone, irrespective of ethnic background, dresses in green and is welcomed as Irish. More than ever, we need rites of passages that can serve as a unifying bond in our society. More than ever, we need to celebrate the gift of life amid the culture of morbidity caused by COVID-19.

Likewise, during Lent, we can celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ died on a cross in order to welcome us into God's kingdom and make us one, irrespective of class, creed, gender, and ethnic background. The Bible states in Galatians 3:

*“So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all **one** in Christ Jesus.”*

Please note that the aforementioned verse says that we are “*one in Christ Jesus.*” This is possible because we have received forgiveness. We all have been accepted. We all have a place in heaven.

What better way to celebrate forgiveness than St. Patrick's Day, even though it is scheduled during Lent?

The Irish approach to Lent offers perspective, balance—and it is biblical. Please recall that Jesus knew he was going to die once he was in Jerusalem. Prior to his arrest, Jesus made the decision to rent an upper room in order to celebrate the gift of life and friendship with his apostles by having a “last meal”: the “last supper.” Jesus made the choice to celebrate. He rented a room, broke bread, and sang a hymn with his friends in the face of his impending death (Mark 14:14-25). It was in this upper room that the sacrament of The Lord's Supper was established, and where Jesus famously said, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” It is this biblical account that has influenced us as a church to hold an Agape Meal in conjunction with The Matchbox in years past during the high holy week of Lent, known as Passion Week, which is the week that leads us to Easter.

Knowing that our faith gives us a biblical precedent to celebrate amid Lent—and, arguably, a dispensation to celebrate amid Lent—how will we choose to celebrate St. Patrick's Day? A green coffee? A green beer? An Irish pun?

As the Irish blessing goes, “*May you have all the happiness and luck that life can hold—and at the end of your rainbows may you find a pot of gold.*”

Have a blessed Lent and St. Patrick's Day!

In Christ,
Pastor Luis
