

An Introduction to the Season of Lent 2024:

Among early Christians, Lent was a season of instruction in the faith. It was used as a season to learn about and practice repenting. The word, “Re – pent” comes from the Latin – re-(again) + poenitere (to be sorry). When combined, it means, “to feel such regret or dissatisfaction over what one has done or failed to do as to change one’s mind or decide to change one’s ways.” Another definition of Repent is, “to feel so contrite over one’s sins as to change one’s attitudes and ways.” As each person was instructed, they would be preparing to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as lord and Savior and then to receive the sacrament of Baptism on the eve of Easter, where the church would gather together and publicly celebrate the life change God was bringing about. For just as Scripture says (and this is my paraphrase), “When one sinner repents, there is a party taking place in heaven! So, on the night before Easter, the party would begin as lives were changed for eternity, and the next morning, early, the church would gather together again to celebrate Resurrection Day, also known as Easter! It was the biggest celebration of the Church Year!

The custom of Lent can be traced back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. It was referenced in the Canons of Nicaea, where we hear about a 40-day period of fasting leading up to Easter. This time of fasting invited the believer to adopt a penitential attitude, while also trying to do some spiritual “housecleaning” – giving up self-serving ways and practicing new behaviors appropriate to God’s baptized people.

The 40-days of Lent do not include Sundays. This is because every Sunday, not just Easter Sunday, is a day to celebrate corporately the Resurrection of Christ! In the early days of the Church, disciples were forbidden to fast or practice any form of penance on Sunday’s during Lent. This was to focus people on repentance as a lead to celebrating the grace, mercy, and forgiveness which comes in Christ. And Sunday Worship was the best time to gather and celebrate those blessings and gifts!

During the season of Lent, there are between 0 and 7 special services of worship held in churches around the world. They consist of none, some, or all the following possible services: Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, a Seder Supper on Friday or Saturday, and Easter Sunday.

This year at Hendersonville Presbyterian Church, we will be celebrating Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday – all during Holy Week. We invited you to join us for each of those special worship services. They will each be unique and special in their own ways. But all of them will point us to the beauty of the Gospel message and the promise of abundant life and life eternal in and through Jesus Christ!

We invite you to take this journey with us to the Cross and to the empty Tomb! Each day during Lent, there will be a devotional of some type for you to use in your spiritual journey, as we prepare together to celebrate Resurrection Day! Share it with your family and your friends. Invite them on the journey with you. And invite them to the special services of worship during Holy Week, March 24-31, 2024. May God grow you and challenge you this Lenten season! Blessings! See you in worship on Sunday!