

Station Five Reflection: Permission Slips

Going back to the beginning of the Church, Lent has always been a season of preparation. For two millennia, Christians have engaged in special practices for these 40 days to prepare for Easter. In the early church that looked like fasting and repenting of wrongdoings.

In our time, this has often looked like giving up chocolate, alcohol, or whatever one's favorite vice is. Or adding something to one's life like 10 minutes of prayer each day, or reading a devotional. And while these kinds of Lenten activities can be helpful, it's also very easy for them to slip into being frivolous exercises in self-control.

I remember being in high school, and every single year I gave up caffeine for Lent. I didn't drink coffee in high school...but I drank a lot of caffeinated soda. And while every year I "did it"...I made it the whole 40 days without drinking any caffeine...I cannot tell you how that helped me get ready for Easter. In fact, what I remember, is that this "practice" did make me look forward to Easter...but for all the wrong reasons. I looked forward to that first sip of Coca-Cola. I looked forward to not having to be so on guard and hyper-vigilant of my behavior. I looked forward to not being the "odd" kid at my lunch table who was drinking juice or water instead of a can of soda.

That isn't what Lenten practices should be about. They aren't supposed to demonstrate how much self-control we can exercise. And they certainly aren't supposed to replace the hope of Christ's resurrection with the hope of getting to indulge.

No...at their best, what Lenten practices are intended for are to help you grow closer to God over these next 40 days. We engage in some sort of special practice or habit during this season so that we might be more fully integrated into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

At this final station, you will find a basket of permission slips. Each slip reads: "to grow closer to God this Lent, I give myself permission to _____."

Phrasing your Lenten practice as a permission slip is a different way of thinking about this. It makes it clear that whatever special habit you do this Lent, that you are doing it with the intention of growing closer to God.

And the specific idea of the permission slip comes from the work of the renowned professor and social worker, Brené Brown. Instead of creating a hard rule that we feel shame or guilt about when we fall short of it (like a New Year's resolution) ...a permission slip is an invitation to allow yourself something. They aren't about shame, guilt, and trying to do it perfectly. They are about freedom, liberation, and allowing.

And so, this Lent,

**What can you give yourself permission for, or set yourself free to do,
that will help you draw closer to God?**

Fill out a permission slip for yourself and take it home with you. Put it up in a prominent place in your home, a place where you will see it every day.

*And may God's grace, peace, and love be with you
and guide you on your way.*