



The Presbyterian Church in Canada



A Reflection on Lent from the Moderator

The other day my husband called to check in with me towards the end of the workday. After coordinating our supper and evening plans, we started talking about an upcoming ministry project. It had been a long day and I was tired and slightly overwhelmed by a heavy load of responsibilities, but Nick had suggestions for me about how to proceed on something. We argued, and I snapped at him.

Immediately after hanging up the phone, my heart was filled with regret and shame. I sent a text message with an apology: “I did not mean to be so grumpy. I am sorry. But I was tired, and I felt like you were pushing me to...” I paused, thought about it, deleted the last part, and hit “send.” My instinct was to explain and to make excuses for how I had spoken crossly to my beloved. But I just needed to be sorry. I didn’t need an excuse for my bad behaviour. My husband read the text and promptly sent me a virtual hug.

As we begin the Season of Lent, we enter into a time of reflection and repentance. We are called to examine our lives, confess our sins, receive God’s forgiveness, and turn towards God’s ways of love, generosity, and grace once again. God knows the reasons for our temptations and the circumstances that lead us to stumble, but God only asks for our sincere “I’m sorry” and our desire to amend our lives. God is ready and waiting to wrap us in a spiritual hug of assurance, forgiveness, and strength for the days ahead.

On Ash Wednesday, many of us will gather to receive the sign of the cross in palm ashes on our foreheads or hands. We will be reminded of our human frailty, our sin, and our dependence on God’s grace in Jesus Christ. It won’t be a time for explanations or excuses, but simply for honest confession. We can have the courage to admit our sins because we know that we are God’s children, and we are deeply and faithfully loved by God.

The words of hymn #199 in the Book of Praise (by Sarah M. de Hall, translation by Janet W. May) provide language to prompt our sincere prayers of confession in this season:

*If I have been the source of pain, O God,
if to the weak I have refused my strength,
if in rebellion I have strayed away, forgive me, God.*

*If I have spoken words of cruelty,
if I have left some suffering unrelieved,
condemn not my insensitivity: forgive me, God.*

*If I've insisted on a peaceful life,
far from the struggles that the gospel brings,
when you prefer to guide me to the strife, forgive me, God.*

*Receive, O God, this ardent word of prayer,
and free me from temptation's subtle snare;
with tender patience, lead me to your care. Amen, amen.*

Holy and merciful God,
we confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

Forgive us for our unkindness towards each other – our family members, friends, and siblings in Christ. We have been rude, dismissive, and impatient with others in person and online, and we are sorry.

Forgive us for our inattention to ongoing oppression and injustice. We have failed to speak and to act for the wellbeing of the poor, the marginalized, and those who continue to suffer in our society, and we are sorry.

Forgive us for our false judgments, uncharitable thoughts, and contempt shown against our neighbours. We have discriminated based on age, gender, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, and we are sorry.

Forgive us for our waste and pollution of your creation. We continue to show little concern for the ongoing sustainability of the environment and for those who come after us, and we are sorry.

Accept our repentance, O God.
Favourably hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.
Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,
that we may show forth your glory in the world.
By the cross and passion of our Saviour,
bring us with all your saints
to the joy of Christ's resurrection. Amen.

—The Rev. Amanda Currie Moderator of the 2019 General Assembly