

**St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA**  
**The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge**  
**Church Year C**  
**Date: 2/14/16**  
**Season: Lent 1**  
**Luke 4:1-13**

One of my favorite Tex-Mex places in Austin is called El Arroyo. Like any good Tex-Mex place worth the salt on the rim of a Margarita, it's a real hole in the wall. In fact, El Arroyo is Spanish for "the ditch." That gets it about right. While the tortillas are soft and the tacos are tasty at El Arroyo, what really endears the place to me and to lots of other folks is its sign board. El Arroyo has one of those sign boards like you see at some churches that has a new message every day. It's usually some pretty witty commentary on politics, and believe me, Texas politics can be pretty humorous, or something about the culture or current events. A couple of days ago I got a note from a friend of mine in Austin with a snapshot of El Arroyo's message board on Ash Wednesday. The sign read:

Lent: Getting Closer to God by Not Eating M&M's for a Few Weeks

Pretty good marketing, right? If you've given up M&M's for Lent, you can stop in to El Arroyo with a clear conscience for the No 2. Enchilada Plate with a fried egg. But I really think El Arroyo's resident theologian has something important to say to us about Lent, how we think of Lent and observe Lent – or how we don't observe Lent. Many of us grew up, I know I did, with the idea that Lent was a time when we would give up guilty pleasures for 40 days. Mine was chocolate. If I would just give up chocolate for 40 days I would emerge on the other side as a better person. Well, I would give up chocolate, all right, or at least try to, but I'll have to say I never discovered anything different about myself or Easter morning when I could finally dive into that chocolate bunny. I hadn't become a noticeably better person, for some reason.

Now, I certainly want to encourage any of us who have decided to forego some of our attachments during this season. If you're letting go of alcohol or Facebook or the internet or anything you're feeling overly attached to, I say a big "yes" to that. Letting go of anything that distracts us from spending time with God and with family and friends is an attachment that needs to be released.

Of course there are other ways to think about Lent. I commend to you something that our own Jennifer Eichenberger wrote in our Lenten Reflections Booklet, copies of which by the way you can pick up in the narthex or at Coffee Hour. On the entry for last Friday, Jen was reflecting on a line from Paul's letter to the Philippians. It comes at the

end of the letter, which Paul was writing from prison you know, and it's part of Paul's good bye to that little community. He says:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worth of praise, think about these things.

And now here's Jen's reflection:

When I think of Lent and this time of year, I want to simplify, declutter my head and home, and feel the peace and freedom to think without the endless "to do's" and "shoulds" weighing me down. As I work through my lists, sort the garage, and find the space to reflect and plan my creative work, I hear this verse and God calling me to really ask myself what is true, pure, pleasing and commendable. It is amazing how much noise can be silenced with the question "what is true?"

Yes, right. It's amazing how much noise can be silenced with the question, "what is true?" So much of the noise in our heads, so many of the stories we tell ourselves, so many of the illusions we live with, it's amazing how all those can be silenced – can be dismissed – by asking ourselves, "what is true?" And it's amazing the peace and freedom we can discover when we turn ourselves away from the lives that we're surrounded by and turn ourselves towards the Truth.

And we do swim in a sea of lies, don't we? Lies that are so often about what we lack, what we don't have, what we need, or who we need to be. Fifty years ago, a well-known New York socialite named Babe Paley famously said, "A woman can't be too thin or too rich." Ever seen a picture of Babe Paley? She was thin as a rail and very, very rich. Yet, she was telling herself the lie that she was neither of those things. There was a hole in her heart she was trying to fill by wealth and appearance. It's the same lie that so much of our marketing is built on. You know, if only you'll buy this product, you'll be better looking, sexier, more successful, more virile, better liked. The not-so-subtle suggestion is that you, Madam or Mister Consumer, are not good enough. You're just not enough. Or look at the political theater that's going on around us. The messages are all about insecurity and fear. Terrorism, immigrants, the poor, the other.

Depending on which candidate you're listening to the target shifts but the message is the same. You should be afraid. You don't have enough and you aren't enough. Elect me and I'll get rid of all the things that terrify you. I'll keep you safe.

Interesting isn't it? The Truth – recognizing the Truth and living in the Truth – is the gateway to peace and freedom, as I've observed. Lies – the lie that we are unworthy,

the lie that we are inadequate, the lie that somehow we are not enough, keeps us enslaved to fear.

There's a reason that one of the names for the devil has always been "the Father of Lies." Jesus himself called Satan by that name. And in our gospel reading this morning we see Jesus entering the conflict between Truth and lies. It's the story of Jesus' preparation for his life's work, preparation that's going to take place in the wilderness for 40 days. It's the time and place where, in the midst of conflict and confrontation, Jesus character will be formed. His 40 days in the wilderness are meant to remind us of the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness, wandering in the desert in search of the Promised Land. It was the time and place where Israel's character was formed and shaped.

And now Jesus is led by the Father of Lies who offers him wealth, glory, and power. And he does this by subtly suggesting that Jesus is lacking, that he doesn't have enough, that **he** is not enough. The devil suggests that **God** is not enough. The lie that's being told here is that wealth, and glory, and power are more satisfying than God, that God and our relationship with God won't provide us all that we need. But Jesus is on to the Father of Lies. He knows that wealth and power and glory would be a pretty poor substitute for being God's beloved. As God's beloved he has all that he needs. And so he dismisses the Father of Lies with the Truth.

And so do we have all that we need of course. The Truth is that we already have all we need. We just need to wake up and recognize it. And Lent is just the right time to begin.

What lies are you telling yourself? Or has someone shamed you and you're believing the lies that flow from that? In my work I see so many dear people who were emotionally abused, maybe even physically and sexually abused as children who are living with the lie that they are not worthy. That they aren't loved. That they can't be loved. That's the lie. A lie told by the Father of lies. Tie to put it down. Better yet, time to hand it to Jesus. Take the lie that you are unworthy, that you are unlovable, and hand it over to Jesus. In your prayer time, look him in the eye. Hear yourself say, "Is it so, Lord? Am I not worthy of your love? Tell me the truth." What do you think you will hear Jesus say? Really. I'll bet I know.

In his invitation to Lent that was broadcast of Ash Wednesday, Bishop Michael Curry said something to the effect of "Let the first day of Lent be the first day of the rest of your life." Are you ready for that? Are you ready for this first Sunday in Lent to be the first day of the rest of your life? In a few minutes we will be coming to this table to share bread and wine. Jesus has set the table for us and he'll meet us here. As we sing, "All to you I now surrender" why don't you really do it? Why don't you take whatever story

you're living with, whatever lie you're living with and surrender it to Jesus? "Is it so, Lord? Really?" Hand him the lie. And then hear the Truth. The Truth that you are worthy, the Truth that you are God's beloved child, the Truth that the love of Christ has really set you free.

So I've got a suggestion for my friends at Al Arroyo for the signboard tomorrow. How about this:

Lent: The Truth is free, but it's not cheap.

That's right. The Truth of God's love and grace is a free gift for all of us, my dear sisters and brothers. But the cost of living into that Truth is the surrender of all our carefully constructed defenses and our familiar narratives. And that might prove to be pretty hard. But living with the lie of our unworthiness is even more expensive, so let this First Sunday in Lent be the First day of the rest of your life. Know the Truth. Surrender to the Truth. The Truth – Jesus' Truth – will set you free. Amen.