

Dear Church,

Lent is soon upon us with Ash Wednesday occurring on Feb. 17, 2021. In the season of Lent, we're reminded that, again and again, suffering and brokenness find us. We doubt again, we lament again, we mess up again. Again and again, the story of Jesus on the cross repeats—every time lives are taken unjustly, every time the powerful choose corruption and violence, every time individuals forget how to love. This past year has not brought anything new but has exacerbated... brought into focus, that which has been with us for a long time. We are seeing more clearly, that which has come around, again and again.

With exasperation we exclaim, "Again?! How long, O God?" And yet, in the midst of the motion blur chaos of our lives, God offers a sacred refrain: "I choose you, I love you, I will lead you to repair." Again and again, God breaks the cycle and offers us a new way forward. In this season, we need rituals—both old and new—to remember and be transformed. Embodied practice builds muscle memory. Repetition helps retrain our neural pathways. *

We begin this Lenten season in the manner that interrupted last year's Lent. We gather – not in our church building, but online, on Zoom, via phone calls. If we happen to meet in person, we are distanced by the 6 feet required for safety and the masks we wear. Ordinary occurrences before -- going out to dinner with groups of friends, going to the movies or concerts, dashing out to the store without a second thought – we now approach with caution and weigh the risks.

This Lenten season, we have been almost a year, masked, socially distanced, aware of the continued threat of the virus. Racial and economic inequity has been magnified, racial and economic injustice, brought front and center in these days. That which we thought could never happen in our nation's capital, did happen, as we watched in disbelief, the events of Jan. 6, in Washington, DC. There is more uncertainty and hesitation. And.... again, it is the season of Lent.

A "Lent at Home" Packet containing a devotional guide and some tools for the journey thorough Lent is being mailed to your home. There will be opportunities for focused study and fellowship in Zoom small groups. Midweek worship opportunities will be provided. We will attempt some unconventional ways to keep familiar rituals, with a How to Make Ashes for Ash Wednesday at Home Tutorial on Zoom, a Virtual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper on Zoom and Ash Wednesday services accessible via several platforms. We will stretch our reach into the community with Facebook Live Noonday Prayer and messages in print and social media. There will be opportunities to give and serve as well as to be still and reflect.

When your Lenten devotional guide arrives in your home, I encourage you to walk through the weekly readings and prompts at your own pace throughout the season, following the rhythm that works best for you. May the art, reflections, and poetry strengthen and stretch you, shaping you into a more faithful disciple. This Lent, may God's steadfast love cradle our laments. May God's grace wash over our weariness. And may we bring all of who we are to God—trusting that God will meet us, time and again, along the way. *

As we did during Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, we will rely upon The Sanctified Art Creative Team, Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Sarah Are, Hannah Garrity, and Lauren Wright Pittman, for many of the resources we will use to build the Lenten experience with St. Andrew's. I am grateful for the depth of reflection, the creativity and generosity with which they share their gifts. Let us notice, with intention, that which comes around, "Again and Again" as we enter into Lent 2021.
Blessings,

Mother June

* Text adapted and gathered from "Again and Again" resources by A Sanctified Art.