**Pastoral Reflection**

**Susanne Guenther Loewen**

**April 1, 2020**

I’ve been reflecting this week on the meaning of Lent, and the shape that this season is taking this year. In some ways, it’s very fitting that all of these restrictions and guidelines around COVID-19 are taking place during Lent, as it’s the season that we associate with giving something up as we prepare for Holy Week and Easter. Usually we fast from small things like coffee or chocolate, or maybe social media, for Lent – things that are mostly symbolic. This year, many of us are actually sacrificing a lot as we give up spending time in-person with family and friends, with colleagues and classrooms, with activity groups and our church community; for others – health care workers, social service providers, front line workers in grocery stores, etc. – the risks and sacrifices are very high. This year, the wilderness of Lent feels very personal and very real. There is real grief this Lent, affecting all of us in various ways.

As we look ahead to celebrating Easter without being able to gather in person as a church community, it’s also starting to sink in that we will have an extended Lent this year. It won’t be ending with Easter, so the timing isn’t going to line up like it usually does. It’s alright for us to grieve this, too, and to begin to prepare ourselves for this Easter to look very different. There are many biblical resources we can draw on in times of lament. Let’s remember that the first Easter involved profound grief and much lament. God is no stranger to grief. And that afterwards, there was – as there always is, eventually – the new life of Resurrection.

 I close with a prayer for this season of Lent:

**Feast and Fast: For Lent 2020**, by Rev. Jim Burklo

Let us fast from hugging and handshaking

And let us feast on bowing and waving.

Let us fast from hoarding food and toiled paper

And let us feast on the food in the back of our pantries.

Let us fast from gathering physically

And let us feast on communing virtually.

Let us fast from obsessing about the future

And let us feast on the everyday wonders of the present.

Let us fast from casting blame for our troubles

And let us feast on creative ways of coping.

Let us fast from worrying about ourselves

And let us feast on showing compassion for the most vulnerable.

Let us fast from being scared

And let us feast on getting prepared.

Let us fast from fear

And let us feast on the perfect Love that casts it out…

AMEN