

Prayer of Preparation: *Never alone. I don't have to worry cause, I'm never alone. Never alone, I don't have to worry cause, I'm never alone. Never alone nooooo!* God of our wilderness journeys, open our hearts and minds to hear and be your good news. **Amen.**

Lent is messy. Using the gospel, or any scripture, as a mirror to our hearts, minds, and souls is really messy...so messy that during Lent we tend to say and do things that, hopefully, we wouldn't do any other time. That's because Lent calls us to empty ourselves and get rid of all the things we hold onto before they become an ugly situation.

Lent is just messy. Just ask **anyone** who is engaging in intentional fasting, prayer, and giving. Lent isn't a suggestion, it's a requirement. And when we truly fast, pray, and give during Lent, things just pop out of us that we didn't even know we had. Or perhaps we know about some of our ungodly tendencies, but we gloss over them saying that's just how we are. Nevertheless, Lent is a time of purposeful discomfort, or dare I say suffering? Lent is a time in which we stop doing all the things we love doing to do those things God calls us to do.

Paul helps us out here. Paul tells us that we're doing is boasting, and that we have a good reason to boast. But not the worldly boasting that the world loves; rather, boasting in Christ.

Here's how Paul puts it to the Ephesians: *And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

Paul tells us that we can go ahead and boast about Christ. We can go ahead and tell the **WHOLE WORLD** that we love God and that we live following a set of rules that mean nothing to anyone but us and God. We can boast about what God is doing in us. And we can boast about what God is doing through us. We can boast. We have every right to boast...in Christ. Not in the “I'm tough because I'm from the West End of Hagerstown.” Not in the “I tell it like it is.” And certainly not in the “I'm going to have the last word.” Those are examples of worldly boasting. We don't do that...and if we are doing that we need to stop.

Paul gives us some advice and tells us that we can boast in our suffering...sort of. We can boast about the suffering we have in our life in Christ. We boast because the outcome of our boasting in Christ is that our boasting will produce hope. And hope is what this world needs.

So, if you're tired because it's still Lent, don't worry. If you're tired because you've been caught boasting in the wrong thing, don't worry...it's still Lent. This is the space and this is the time when we fast, pray, and worship together and hold each other accountable because the hope that is our salvation is on the way.

The psalmist calls us to rejoice in hope, rejoice in salvation, because God is with us. God is our companion on this journey, no matter where we are on the Lenten road. Hear the psalmist again with a fresh ear: *O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

We're halfway there...rejoice!

Response to the Word: *Never alone. I don't have to worry cause, I'm never alone. Never alone, I don't have to worry cause, I'm never alone. Never alone nooooo!*