

March 2012

Health Topic

Sturgeon Bay United Methodist Church
Carol Moellenberndt, parish nurse

Fasting During Lent

Fasting during Lent is being highlighted during this Lenten Season as the Adult Forum and the mid-week Lenten Services will be centered on a book called "A Place at the Table" by Chris Seay. In the book Seay talks about the importance of fasting and its use during the time of Lent. So, what is "Fasting", how can it be used in Lent and *Is Fasting Healthy?*

Simply stated "Fasting" is something you do when you stay away from all food or from specific types of food for a set amount of time. The length of the fast may be one meal, one day, a week or longer. Fasting can be done for a variety of reasons. We "fast" for part of each day when we sleep at night and wake up and eat "breakfast". We need to fast for our cholesterol blood work or to prep for surgery. Some people fast to lose weight or to "detoxify" the body or to treat disease. These reasons for fasting should be looked at carefully because fasting can cause some problems with our bodies. People who fast for weight loss often get quick results because they are losing water weight. Also Fasting slows your metabolic rate so that when you start eating again, the weight comes back on more easily and you end up gaining more weight! Some studies have shown improvement with some medical conditions with the use of fasting. According to Joel Fuhrman, MD, "fasting followed by a vegetarian diet interferes with the immune system's activities." This can help with various auto-immune diseases such as lupus, arthritis and chronic skin conditions. It can also help with problems with the digestive tract. It has not been proven that this is true, however, and there are certain people who should not fast including:

- Pregnant women
- People with wasting diseases or malnutrition
- Those who have a history of cardiac arrhythmias (irregular heart rate)
- People with liver or kidney problems
- People with eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia

People with medications and other health problems, such as diabetes, should talk with their physician before going on a fast. While fasting for a day or two is rarely a problem if you are healthy, it can be quite dangerous if you are not already eating a healthy diet.

Abstaining from food does not, in itself, constitute a Christian Fast. In a Christian Fast Prayer becomes a special focus. In the book, "A Place at the Table", Chris Seay recommends that we do a prayer walk each day. Fasting can provide self-discipline and self-control in your life. When you restrain yourself physically it can become easier to apply the self-discipline in your spiritual life. Fasting often causes a heightened sense of attentiveness so that you can be more alert to what God may be trying to say to you. Fasting shows our dependence on God for things more important than food. Fasting can empower a new found strength in your spiritual life.

"Be Still
and Know
That I Am
God."
Psalm 46:10



"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days"
Luke 4:1-2

Health News Notes

- **Parish Nurse hours** 10am-2pm Thursdays. Carol on vacation March 15th - 30th.
- **Blood Pressure check** on March 11th after both services.
- **Parkinson Support Group** Thursday March 1st - Caregiver Support Group will meet with caregivers and Carol will meet with people with Parkinson Disease.

Chris Seay talks about fasting either as a short time without food, or picking a couple days per week where you eat simple foods which those in third world countries would eat. And as you have this type of fast you can pray for those who eat this way each day and do not have the choice to return to our extravagant diets whenever they want to. I felt hungry as I ate my rice, beans, and cornmeal mush one day - but many people do not even have enough of those simple provisions for their daily use.

Seay suggests using Sundays as feast days and celebrate the joy of eating on those days. Savor each flavor in a meal and notice the colors and textures. Take the time to savor the company of those who are sharing a meal with you. Take the time to be still "*Be Still and Know that I am God.*" (Psalm 46:10) "Embrace the feast, Embrace the rhythm of the Kingdom", says Seay.

Many Blessings on Your Lenten Journey!