

Why does worship feel different this morning?

We have now entered the season of Lent in the Christian year. This is a forty-day period of renewal for people of faith in which we are invited to an intentional thoughtfulness about what we consume, how we engage with the world around us, and where we can draw strength and nourishment from our relationship with God. Our Lenten worship changes over this period of time in order to facilitate reflection, to nurture a posture of attentiveness to our prayer and our faith. Although nothing about Lenten worship is particularly 'new' – it follows rites which are offered in our Book of Alternative Services – it will feel simpler and quieter. No matter how this worship affects you, whether you find it refreshing or unsettling, note your feelings and reflect on what this is telling you about where and how you most naturally connect with God.

A few notes on the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of our Lenten worship:

No Procession - We are used to worship beginning and ending with a great organ-led hymn as the choir and the worship leaders symbolically enact the journey of faith in which we all share by processing into, or out of, the sanctuary. During Lent, we emphasize simplicity and reflection by quietly walking to our places from the side of the church.

Penitential Rite - We begin our worship with a time of repentance, reflecting on the brokenness of our lives, the mistakes we have made, our need for healing in ourselves and in our world. This is not about inducing guilt, it is about creating space for being prayerfully honest about our need for God to be present, forgiving, and renewing in our lives.

Purple - Mirroring this emphasis in the shape of our worship is the colour purple in our church decor. Purple has traditionally been used to symbolize penitence.

Psalms – Normally our choir leads this part of our Scriptural proclamation through song. The psalms are found in Scripture and are the most ancient hymns which we have. Saying these words of Scripture responsively changes our focus and our participation and allows us to hear these words differently as we share in saying them together.

Peace – Normally we are in the routine of 'sharing the peace' in the middle of the service. By sharing the Peace at the end of our worship, we again simplify and streamline our communal prayer. We still enjoy this time of friendship and warmth with one another, but it becomes a transition from the formal to the informal part of our fellowship and gathering. Theologically, the emphasis changes too: rather than being reconciled with one another *before* we come to God's table, instead we discover that we are reconciled with one another *because* of being at God's table.

No 'Alleluia' – Our Sunday School children helped us to prepare for Lent by 'hiding' the Alleluia last weekend. Like many good and life-giving things from which we might choose to abstain during Lent, this joyful and celebratory word becomes all the more powerful and meaningful at Easter for having intentionally gone without it for these forty days.