



**AQUIA**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

# Cross Section

*All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27*

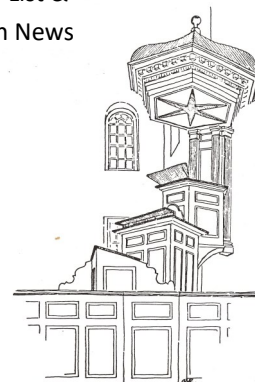


SERVE ONE  
ANOTHER  
IN LOVE.

GALATIANS 5:13, NIV

## INSIDE:

- A New Focus for This Lent
- Hard Sayings of the Bible
- Dust Thou Art: The Ancient Origin of Lent
- Vestry Highlights
- ECW Spreads Love Through Church Activities
- Join Sts. Mary & Martha for fellowship, book study and crafts
- How does Aquia's Table Deliver Hot Meals Each Week?
- Flower Guild Appreciation
- Prayer List & Church News





## CROSS SECTION

### Aquia Episcopal Church

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Stafford, Va.

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**Office hours:**  
8 a.m.– 4 p.m.  
Tuesday– Friday

*Rector*  
**The Rev. Jay Morris**

*Assistant Rector*  
**The Rev. James Rickenbaker**

*Treasurer*  
**Chris Arey**

*Assistant Treasurer*  
**Charlie Bingay**

*Music Director*  
**Trystan Bennett**

*Dir. Christian Education*  
**Kristen Morgan**

*Parish Administrator*  
**Sue Selz**

*Bookkeeper*  
**Gloria Reyes**

*Nursery Supervisor*  
**Dawna Spaulding**

## FROM THE RECTOR

### A New Focus for This Lent

There are some verses in Scripture that haunt me, and one of them always gets my attention during Lent: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

Most people—if they are being even minimally honest—would probably acknowledge that no mere mortal may claim legitimately to be entirely free from sin. Yet it’s not clear to me that we properly admit our sinfulness enough, despite plenty of opportunities to do so. It’s so much easier to identify the sins that other people commit than for one to recognize one’s own wrongdoing—so much more fun to find fault in our fellow humans than for me to fess up and say quite simply “I sinned.” Perhaps we would welcome the chance to say that we do not sin too often or too severely, and just let the matter go in our smug self-satisfaction. But then in candor we would have to concede that we have duped ourselves into such a false belief.

Self-deception is a problem that we likely overlook most every time it occurs. After all, if we can deceive ourselves about truth and reality, how can we spot it when it is happening? Am I so gullible and naïve that I would allow myself to be tricked and deluded by my very own self? It’s bad enough when others lie to me and shade the truth, but perhaps it’s even worse that I would perpetrate a fraud against myself. And when I do that to myself, ultimately

I’m adversely affecting my relationship with others, too—even with God.

The prophets of the Old Testament and the evangelists of the New Testament agree that self-deception is a situation that we must confront directly and forthrightly because of its connection with sin. One instance of self-trickery on its own might not seem too important at first; but like a snowflake that turns into a snowball and then into an avalanche, or like a virus that spreads from one person throughout an area to infect an entire population, the consequences of failing to handle the matter appropriately can be devastating.

Mercifully, however, that haunting verse about self-deception is followed immediately by another that is far more hopeful: “But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, BCP 352). Just as we need to confess and repent, we also need a clean slate and fresh start with each other and with God. Lent is a season devoted to our ongoing opportunity to assess our situation in light of God’s love, to admit what we must about ourselves by God’s mercy, and to accept healing from God’s grace. To be sure, Lent is a season that exposes us to some risk; yet the risks we would incur by not engaging in self-examination and repentance are even greater and more painful, for then we would neither receive nor rejoice in God’s pardoning power.

We are invited to join together in this Lenten journey, which includes “reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (BCP 265). This way, we might not only be haunted by how God still speaks boldly to us throughout Scripture, but also be dazzled by how the same Scripture fills us with hope. Some Christians mistakenly (if understandably) believe that Lent mainly involves feeling bad about ourselves, and accordingly they refuse to embrace Lent. Don’t fool yourself into falling for that nonsense! Instead, focus less on the starting-point and more on the end-goal.

*Jay Morris*



## FROM THE ASSISTANT RECTOR

### Hard Sayings of the Bible

Dear Family in Christ,  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! I thank our God for you, especially for how fervent you are in studying the word of God in Holy Scripture. It is a book that speaks to us the promises of God that are bestowed upon us by grace through faith. Holy Scripture attests to the love that God has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. God's love for us is so great that he was willing to take on human flesh for us, to die on the cross for our sins, and to rise again for our justification. The good news of Holy Scripture is that Jesus Christ is for you. This truly is the heart of the Gospel.

But not everything in Scripture comes across as good news. There are some sayings in the Bible that are hard. Perhaps they are hard sayings because they are hard to understand, like John 10:34, "I have said you are 'gods.'" What in the world could Jesus mean when he says that? Isn't there only one God? Or perhaps they are hard sayings because they are hard to put into practice, such as Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." That one hits home every time. I'm not perfect, so perhaps I'm in trouble. No matter how you slice it, there are some things in Scripture that are hard.

For that reason, I wanted to teach a Bible study on these hard sayings of the Bible. I led a series on this theme five years ago, so I figured it was time to do it again. The current series began on Jan. 18 and is set to run through Feb. 22, which is Ash Wednesday. We are covering quite a lot of ground in the series—from the two sayings listed above, to Romans 14:2, "One...whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables," and plenty of other passages. Our goal is to address some of the difficult sayings we find in Scriptures and take the opportunity to think through what they have to teach us. If we believe with the apostle Paul (as we should) that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16), then

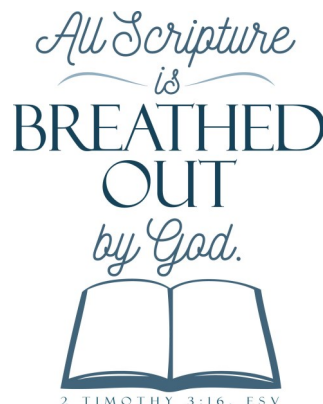
anything from Genesis to Revelation is part of God's word and thus worth our while.

What are some of the hard sayings that you have encountered in your reading of Scripture? Please let me know, either in person or via e-mail ([rickenbaker@aquiachurch.org](mailto:rickenbaker@aquiachurch.org)). I would be interested in adding them to our list. If this series needs to be extended, I would be happy to do so. If not, please still do let me know and I'll be happy to offer another hard sayings series at a later date. I want this to be an encouragement to you in your study of Scripture.

Finally, I would like to end this article with an appropriate prayer for the series. This is the contemporary Collect for Proper 28 from *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979): "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen" (page 236).

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

*In Christ,  
Fr. James*



### AQUA CHURCH VESTRY

**Chris Bowie**

*Administration Committee*

**Michael Golasz**

*Building & Grounds Committee*

**Dale Hendon**

*Finance Committee*

**Carolyn Hendrickson**

*Administration Committee*

**Bill Hoffman**

*Senior Warden*

**Sarah Kirby**

*Administration Committee*

**Walt Peterson**

*Administration Committee*

**Anna Rall**

*Register  
Finance Committee*

**Lisa Schwartz**

*Administration Committee*

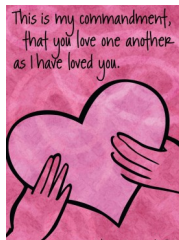
**Penny Stevens**

*Building & Grounds Committee*



## EPISCOPAL CHURCH WOMEN

February is the month when we celebrate love, the most important form of which is God's love for us. That is true even during the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, forty days (excluding Sundays) before Easter.



While Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday) is the traditional feast day before the start of the fasting season of Lent, this year Aquia's ECW will observe a Shrove Tuesday tradition on a different day. On Sunday, Feb. 19, the ECW will serve a Shrove Tuesday-style pancake breakfast in the great hall during the times of our Sunday fellowship breakfast and Morning Call (8:30 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.) at no charge. We hope you will bring your family and start your Lenten season with us.

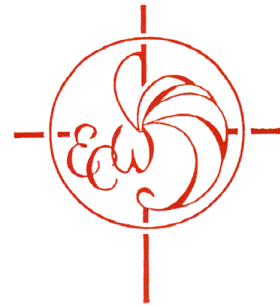
One of my favorite Bible verses about God's love for us is this: "We

love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). From the Bible we also learn the definition of love: "Love is patient, it is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). During Lent in particular, the Sunday lessons from Scripture are centered around God's love for us.

The Episcopal Church Women's mission is to share the love of God by making Christ known in the world through prayer, education, concern for others, and joyful service. "Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14), the Bible tells us. There we also learn this truth: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12).

It is important to remember to love and share God's love in our lives and in our Christian activities and mission.

Some of our annual activities in the months ahead include Aquia's Her-



itage Sunday in May, our Spring UTO Ingathering, Homecoming in September, Fall Fest in October, our Fall UTO Ingathering, the annual meeting of the diocesan ECW, and the annual meeting of Aquia's ECW in December. If any of these special occasions piques your interest and you would like to learn more about it, please get in touch with me. My contact information is listed in the parish directory, or you may get that information from our parish administrator, Sue Selz, in the church office.

*Briget Kane*

**Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with *thy* most gracious favor, and further us with *thy* continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in *thee*, we may glorify *thy* holy Name, and finally, by *thy* mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Book of Common Prayer, page 832





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## STS. MARY AND MARTHA

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### Worship, Service, and Fellowship

The Sts. Mary and Martha Guild would like to thank everyone who dropped by to shop at our ECW Advent gift tables in the great hall. We thank you for your patronage and for your generosity. Our remaining inventory is now packed up; but if you should need Aquia Church note cards, a church cookbook, a votive candle, or one of the charming tea towels spotlighting Jackie Chichester or Pat Moncure, just send us an e-mail and we will be glad to get it to you. One towel from Jackie features a recipe for Easter lamb, which might come in handy for April 9!

In February we shall continue with our study of *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by the Rev. Tish Harrison Warren. She has helped us see God at work in all we do from misplacing our keys to checking our e-mail, and we look forward to the

last few chapters of this intriguing study.

We will also get started on the crafts for Fall Fest 2023, which is only 8 months away!

We are constantly looking for new ideas for the craft room, so if you have a fall or Christmas decoration or ornament that you think we could make, please share it with us. Your ideas on how to keep our inventory up-to-date and interesting are always appreciated.

Please do consider joining the Sts. Mary and Martha Guild for Morning Prayer, which is led by a member of our clergy and followed by a simple study and wonderful fellowship. Our meet-



JOIN OUR  
**STUDY**

ings, which are scheduled for the first, third, and fifth (when applicable) Thursday mornings of the month, begin at 9:30 and end by noon. We have plenty of room around our table for both you and a friend.

Please note that we do not meet when winter weather closes Stafford County schools or delays their opening. For further information, you can reach out to Mary Jane Cole ([maryjane@cfsw.biz](mailto:maryjane@cfsw.biz)) or Carolyn Hendrickson ([cvhendrickson35@gmail.com](mailto:cvhendrickson35@gmail.com)).

*Mary Jane Cole*

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## AQUIA'S TABLE

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This year Aquia's Table opened with a bang. Our ministry continues to serve hot meals weekly to over 300 individuals (usually closer to 350). Takeout service can involve either our brown-bag meals or standard takeout containers.

The kitchen prep and cooking volunteers work on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to have meal service ready each Wednesday at 6 p.m. Each week our baking teams prepare homemade desserts that are added to each meal, whether brown bags or standard

takeout containers (sometimes called 'clamshells'). The preparation teams are supported by meal packers and servers who greet our guests and distribute the takeout meals. Others involved develop the menus for healthy, nourishing meals that are served weekly. Still other folks provide supplies such as takeout containers of different sizes and shapes, brown bags, fresh and canned foods, and fresh meat. Finally there is our crew who keeps our kitchen clean from start to finish at each meal. At the end of the evening, we

turn off the lights and start prep for the following week.

Our community partners continue to support our ministry with donations of food. Our parish family lends their important assistance too, with financial gifts, donations of supplies, and contributions of food that sustain our ministry.



Our largest fundraiser will be our annual golf tournament on the first Friday in May. Plan to put a foursome together or join a team! More information to follow.

If you love to prepare food, pick up supplies, bake, or otherwise want to help, simply contact a member of the Aquia's Table core team.

*Briget Kane*



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## VESTRY HIGHLIGHTS

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Dec. 20, 2022

### Business Session

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

### Treasurer's Report

Chris Arey updated the Vestry on the finances of the church. There were no major surprises to report.

### Minutes from Previous Meeting

- **R-2022-22: Investment Policy of Aquia Episcopal Church** (approved 11/22)
- **R-2022-23: Adjustment in Contract for Janitorial Services** (approved 11/22)

The minutes were approved unanimously.

### New Business

- **R-2022-24: Designation of Parsonage Allowance for the Rector** (Finance Committee)
- **R-2022-25: Designation of Parsonage Allowance for the Assistant Rector** (Finance Committee)

Fr. Jay explained R-2022-24 and R-2022-25. These annual, *pro forma* resolutions were approved unanimously.

- **R-2022-26: Policy on Designation of Memorial Contributions** (Finance Committee)

Fr. Jay explained this resolution, the purpose of which is to establish that unspecified memorial contributions will automatically go to the Heritage Endowment Fund, unless otherwise directed by the Vestry. The resolution was approved unanimously.

- **R-2022-27: Additional Payment on Principal of CFFB Construction Loan** (Finance Committee)

This resolution would direct the Treasurer to pay an additional \$50,000.00 on

the principal of the construction loan before the end of 2022. It would also commit the Vestry to thinking about doing something similar during 2023. The resolution was approved unanimously.

- **R-2022-28: Authorization for Treasurer to Transfer Reserve Funds** (Finance Committee)

This resolution would direct the Treasurer to move a small portion of reserve funds into short-term investment vehicles, such as a certificate of deposit. The resolution was approved unanimously.

- **R-2022-29: Adoption of 2023 Budget** (Finance Committee)

Senior Warden and Assistant Treasurer Charlie Bingay explained the draft budget to the Vestry. The budget was amended in a couple of places. It is balanced, as required by the terms of our construction loan for the new building. The resolution was approved unanimously.

### Ongoing Business

- Fall Nut/Candy Sales: \$2,941.00 YTD (vs. main expense of \$1,300.00)
- Annual Pledge Campaign for 2023: \$336,423.00 from 71 adult pledges, plus \$173.00 from 3 youth pledges, plus \$62,230.00 from 12 pledges for Heritage Endowment Fund
- Vestry Elections (nominees: Dale Hendon, Bill Hoffman, Walter Peterson)

The Vestry voted unanimously to approve the above slate of candidates and to recommend their election by acclamation at the annual meeting, which is set for Jan. 8.



## Vestry Highlights

### Reports from Committees, Wardens, and Rector

Fr. Jay reported on the Administration Committee's meeting from the previous week. The meeting dealt primarily with goals for 2023.

Dickie Boes reported on the Finance Committee's meeting. He indicated that the majority of the material was covered in the resolutions that were discussed earlier in this vestry meeting.

Bob Brandon reported on the work of the Building and Grounds Committee. Ron Korth has been doing some needed HVAC repairs on the buildings on campus and the Rectory. Bob expressed gratitude for being able to serve as Junior Warden.

Charlie Bingay expressed gratitude for his ability to serve as Senior Warden for the last year and for the hard work of the Vestry.

Fr. Jay reported that the Aquia Church Trustees have completed Aquia's part of the land sale transaction of Clifton Chapel. The paperwork is now going to the purchasers at St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church to complete. Fr. Jay hopes to report further on this at the annual meeting in January. Fr. Jay also spoke briefly about the events surrounding and including the consecration of the 14th Bishop of the Diocese of Virginia. Fr. Jay also thanked the Vestry members who are rotating off: Charlie Bingay, Dickie Boes, and Bob Brandon.

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## FROM THE FLOWER GUILD

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I want to thank all who helped contribute to the recent Advent and Christmas decorations for the church sanctuary. Because of your efforts, the sanctuary was beautiful and inspiring to all who worshipped at Aquia Church this past Advent and Christmas season. I especially would like to thank Fred Haebeler for providing the beautiful magnolia boughs, along with Chris Arey, Penny Stevens, Margaret Hedger, Patricia Springer, Christine Bowie, and Barbara Bingay for their time and talent. And a special thanks to Sue Selz for ordering all of the poinsettias, garland, and wreaths! It was truly beautiful, and Betsy Husser and I are so thankful for all of the efforts and donations received to make this blessing happen.

Thanks,  
Sheryl Colliver



### Drivers Needed for Sharing Altar Flowers

For many weeks of the year, after the altar flowers have adorned our sanctuary, they are rearranged and delivered to church members who are in the hospital or nursing home, who are ill or grieving, or who otherwise might welcome receiving such a lovely gift. We hope that some parishioners might volunteer to take the rearranged flowers from the church office to the intended recipient—usually one per week but occasionally two, with the

church office providing driving directions, and with no driving required during the seasons of Lent and Advent. The time commitment and effort are limited, but the joy of sharing is such a blessing. If you are willing to be a driver for sharing these flowers, please contact Sue Selz in the church office (540-659-4007 or [office@aquiachurch.org](mailto:office@aquiachurch.org)).

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### Upcoming Dates

- 12/24 Christmas Eve worship (4:30 p.m., 7 p.m., and 10 p.m., with Christmas music beginning 30 minutes prior to each service)
- 12/25 Christmas Day worship (10 a.m.)

- 1/8/2023 Parish's Annual Meeting with Election of New Vestry Members (9 a.m. in the great hall; (in case of snow/ice, backup date is one week later)
- 1/14/2023 Vestry Retreat (9 a.m.—3 p.m.; tentative day and time)

- 1/24 Vestry meeting (7 p.m. via Zoom)

### Good of the Order, Closing Prayer, and Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,  
(The Rev.) James Rickenbaker  
Acting Register for this meeting



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## FROM THE CHURCH OFFICE

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### FROM THE PARISH REGISTER

**Burials:** *“Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord; and let the light perpetual shine upon them.”*

Mary Cary Kendall, 1930-2022.

### SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS AT AQUIA CHURCH

**New Babies:** Thanksgiving for the birth of a child will be offered as part of the service and will be scheduled as needed. Please call the church office the week prior if your family would like to be included. Also, please call the church office after a birth so that a red rose can be placed on the altar in thanksgiving.

**Those being deployed:** Please call the church office so that we can offer special prayers at a service prior to your departure. Also, we would like to put you on our prayer list for all those who are deployed in the service of our country.

### FUTURE BAPTISMS

The next scheduled date for a baptism is April 16, 2023. If you would like to have a baptism on this date, or if this date doesn't work for you and you would like to request another date, please contact the church office so that counseling with the clergy can be scheduled.

### Aquia Church Prayer List

February 2023

Rhett Blythe and Family, Brandon family, Debbie Byers, Robert & JoAnn Feldman, Lori Hendon, Rachael Hofford, Ken Luehrs, Lori, Pat Moncure, Rebecca Poole, Arnie Schwartz, Scott Smith, O.D. Taylor, John & Pam Tompkins, Gayle Tompkins, Kenneth Tompkins, Tom Tremper, Jen Wassmer, Patrick Weber, Walt & Elizabeth Yager.



### How to reach us:



[www.aquiachurch.org](http://www.aquiachurch.org)

[office@aquiachurch.org](mailto:office@aquiachurch.org)

(540) 659-4007

<https://www.facebook.com/AquiaEpiscopalChurch>



We, as Aquia Church, joyfully respond to the grace, love and fellowship  
of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit at work in our midst  
by celebrating His presence, sharing His abundance,  
and proclaiming His word throughout the world.





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## Dust Thou Art

Lent always begins on Ash Wednesday. The Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday was often referred to as Quinquagesima Sunday, a word derived from the Latin for “fiftieth”—as that Sunday was fifty days before Easter, the last Sunday in Shrovetide. The readings for this Sunday focus on the Transfiguration of Jesus. But after the larder is emptied and the pancakes are finished, Ash Wednesday falls upon us, and we enter a forty-day penitential season (which actually covers 46 calendar days—Sundays are still regarded as feast days and thus are not counted in the 40 days of Lent) in preparation for Christ’s Passion and Resurrection.

You will hear an ardent appeal from our clergy to attend an Ash Wednesday service, as the impact of this day is almost necessary to observing a holy Lent. This call to observe a holy Lent echoes the real sense of holiness—a separateness with fasting, prayer, and repentance. Christians continue the ancient practice of using ashes as an external sign of repentance. In our 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the words of imposition echo the words of Genesis 3:19, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (KJV).

The church’s practice of observing Ash Wednesday as the start of Lent is an ancient one. It is grounded in the biblical significance of publicly mourning our sins, repenting, and seeking forgiveness. In the Old Testament, ashes were often paired with sackcloth (better understood to mean ‘goat’s hair cloth,’ as in a hair shirt). The prophet Jeremiah calls for repentance by saying: “O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, roll in the ashes” (Jeremiah 6:26). The prophet Daniel recounted pleading to God: “I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes” (Daniel 9:3). In the New Testament, Matthew reports, “Then Jesus began to denounce the

towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes’” (Matthew 11:20-22).

The early church continued this practice. The church father Tertullian (c. 160—c. 225) wrote that confession of sin should be accompanied by lying in sackcloth and ashes. The historian Eusebius (c. 260/265—339/340) recounts how a repentant apostate covered himself with ashes when begging Pope Zephyrinus to readmit him to communion. In much of western Europe (though not in Rome), by the end of the 10th century, it was customary for the church to administer ashes on the first day of Lent. In 1091, Pope Urban II at the council of Benevento ordered that this practice to be extended to the church in Rome. Not long thereafter, the day was identified in liturgical books as “Feria Quarta Cinerum” (which became known as Ash Wednesday).

While the Protestant Reformation did not forbid the imposition of ashes at the beginning of Lent, after the death of Henry VIII in 1547 Thomas Cranmer removed the custom from the Church of England. As the Archbishop of Canterbury, he procured an order to forbid the carrying of candles on Candlemas Day, and the use of ashes on Ash Wednesday, and of palms on Palm Sunday, as “superstitious ceremonies,” though this order only applied to the See of Canterbury. Thereafter, however, across England the use of ashes was discontinued by many churches as a “vain show” and Ash Wednesday then became only a day of marked solemnity, with a memorial of its original character in a reading of the curses denounced against impenitent sinners, recounting God’s commands in Deuteronomy 11:26-29. In the United States in the 19th century, the Episcopal Church observed Ash



Wednesday “as a day of fasting and humiliation, wherein we are publicly to confess our sins, meekly to implore God’s mercy and forgiveness, and humbly to intercede for the continuance of his favor.” Only with the 1979 Book of Common Prayer were prayers provided for the imposition of ashes.

Most Eastern Orthodox churches do not observe Ash Wednesday, but rather begin the Great Lent on “Clean Monday.” The ashes we use are traditionally taken from the palm branches from the prior Palm Sunday. On Ash Wednesday we will hear Jesus’ words from Matthew 6, where Jesus warns us about practicing our piety before others to include disfiguring our faces to advertise our self-ascribed holiness. The solemnity of observing Ash Wednesday has a long history. The imposition of ashes is a reminder of our mortality. Yet as the ashes are marked on our foreheads in the form of a cross, we can recall our eternal hope and Christ’s victory over death.

*Chris Arey*





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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Lent:  
*A Season of Preparation*

## February 2023 **READING ROOM** by Jay Morris

My regular column in the main part of this edition of our *Cross Section* newsletter introduces some issues about self-deception with particular attention to some connections between self-deception and Lent. But here in this space, I want to share some remarks about self-deception that are aimed more broadly, in the hopes that the matter might become intriguing to you and thus might whet your appetite for participating in our Lenten dinner-and-discussion series that will begin on Thursday, Feb. 23 (the day after Ash Wednesday) and run throughout the Thursdays in March.

In case you have not heard of self-deception, start by thinking about what deception in general means. It occurs when one person or group deliberately deceives, tricks, or fools another person or group into believing something that is false, wrong, or untrue. Similarly, when one begins to ignore, disregard, or even deny facts, evidence, truth, reality, and logical argument about them, or when one begins to fabricate alternative accounts of those matters and then hides the accurate perspective from oneself, then one begins to commit self-deception. It involves persuading yourself one way about something when the opposite situation is correct while also obscuring that conflict from yourself. A simple example might suffice for now: if I know that premeditated murder is surely wrong and yet I want to commit it anyway, then I have to lie to myself that something about this specific situation makes premeditated murder legitimately good to do in this instance. But that approach raises a number of questions, such as the following: Why would I tell myself a lie and believe the fib—how could I reasonably tolerate that situation? Am I somehow schizophrenic (literally: split-minded) for believing that premeditated murder is wrong while committing the same crime—and if so, then what does that say about my personality, my character, and my mental health? How can I discern whether I am telling myself the truth or whether I am tricking myself about these matters—how would I recognize the difference? Is there more to self-deception than denying facts, inventing a false reality, and rationalizing away the truth? Other classic cases of self-deception include alcoholics and other addicts who convince themselves that their substance abuse is under their firm control, as well as jealous competitors in sports or commerce who assume that their rivals' success is not the result of talent and hard work but is instead the consequence of some injustice or unfair advantage. In religious contexts, self-deception can be seen prominently in cases of idolatry (for instance, where the people of Israel know that they should worship exclusively the Lord God Almighty and yet they construct statues and pray to them) and in the mental anguish that the apostle Paul describes in Romans 7 about knowing the good things to do but failing or refusing to do them while also doing the bad things that one already knows are wrong and injurious to do. Also consider James 1:8, a verse which implies that someone who is double-minded is indecisive, unstable, and untrustworthy—how might that situation affect friendships, business relationships, and marriages? In such ways, questions about self-deception can quickly become questions about sin, spirituality, human frailty, social networks, and our need for a way out of the morass. Accordingly, these topics can be quite helpful as a starting-point and a guiding theme for our Lenten journey this year.

Self-deception is a problem with which I first became familiar when I was teaching philosophy at the University of Virginia. Since those days, I have learned more about the matter in a variety of ways—not only by reading broadly from the work of psychologists and journalists (regarding which see, for instance, the book *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception* [Simon & Schuster, 1996] by Daniel Goleman, who is renowned for his writing on emotional intelligence and leadership) and existentialist literature (where self-deception is a prominent topic in authors as diverse as Søren Kierkegaard [who wrote about the purity of heart as desiring only one thing instead of two] and Jean-Paul Sartre [who wrote famously about bad faith]), but also by seeing it realized in everyday life, especially in pastoral counseling. The best book about self-deception and its place in Christian discipleship that I have found, is our featured book for this year's Lenten series: *I Told Me So: Self-Deception and the Christian Life* (Eerdmans. 2009) by Gregg A. Ten Elshof, who teaches philosophy at Biola University in California. This volume is brief at roughly 140 pages of text, and it has some philosophical elements, but it is far from heavy-handed. Ten Elshof's writing is clear and engaging, and it is pitched very practically at the daily lives of Christians. I have critical questions to raise about a few of his views, such as his remarkable suggestion that not all instances of self-deception are bad or hurtful. (That's a claim that should give us plenty to discuss!) Yet where I find Ten Elshof particularly helpful—besides his overall presentation about what self-deception is, and how and why it occurs—are his cautionary notes against becoming overwhelmed or needlessly distracted by the threat of self-deception. These notes can help us as we think about how to understand self-deception, how to identify it when it happens, and how to overcome it and move past it—which is surely part of our end-goal for this season of self-examination and refreshment. I hope that you will join us for some lively conversation and debate as we ponder these matters together during our Lenten dinner-and-discussion series. You may register for this series on the sign-up sheet at the back of the church, or let Sue Selz in the church office know about your interest in attending.