

Kirk of St James Sermon
February 22nd, 2026
Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

In December I was driving with Grayson when out of the blue the following conversation took place, “Mommy, you should get one of those long cars.” “A limo?” “Yeah a limo, then you can drive it around while I sit in the back and eat pizza and look at Christmas lights.” It struck me as funny, this elaborate and extravagant plan that he was genuinely trying to sell me on. To be fair I thought it also sounded like a great idea—just out of our budget! This story crossed my mind while I was thinking about shrove Tuesday (or fat Tuesday as some call it) when some people make a tradition of eating rich foods to use up the fat and dairy before the austerity of the Lenten season begins. A feast day before a fast if you will. Often we come into lent with this mindset for good reason, as we remember the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted. Lent is a season when we typically place a larger emphasis on repentance—turning away from sin and working toward a right relationship with God, and we don’t see anything remotely extravagant until the joy of Easter morning.

“The liturgical season of Lent is typically a time set aside for penitence. On Ash Wednesday, Christians are invited to enter a period of self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, and self-denial. We are called to use these forty days as time of particular reflection on our sins, the ways that we separate ourselves from God and from one another. Thus, it is easy to characterize Lent as the somber, solemn period of the church year.” To that end normally the first Sunday of lent is spent preaching on either the Genesis passage which narrates the sin of Adam and Eve and the breaking of their relationship with God as they pursued more knowledge or, even more obvious is the account we read in Matthew today which tells the story of Jesus in the wilderness.

However, Psalm 32 offers us something else, that is easily overlooked during this season in the church year.

This Psalm starts out as we expect, the writer describing their body wasting away, as God's hand is heavy upon them and their strength is dried up. This is a scene we can understand as we wade through the wasteland of lent. The wilderness is never hospitable, and we are there not for comfort but to be shaken awake and out of complacency. While that may be true Psalm 32 moves us into a before and after photo of the writer's experience of confessing their sins to God. The move from feeling broken and empty to feeling joy—and that is something we often do not talk about during lent.

One part of lent is certainly about us acknowledging our sins to God. It is the process of coming to terms with ourselves and the ways we have not loved God with our whole heart and not loved our neighbour as ourselves.” It means admitting things about ourselves that we would rather ignore. Sometimes it also includes the difficult tasks of putting aside our pride, seeking the forgiveness of other individuals, and, in some cases, seeking the forgiveness of our community. As Christian writer Anne Lamott says, “Though theologians insist that grace is freely given, the truth is that sometimes you pay for it through the nose.”

I am uncertain about you but sometimes in my life I can be a bit of beaver and dam up my thoughts and feelings, my worries, fears, anxieties and shortcomings. While that means that it can sometimes make us feel like we are not rocking the boat too much, that also means that sometimes all those toxic hurtful things keep swirling around us. Sometimes repentance and confession is not just about admitting where we go astray in our lives but also about letting go of the things that we cling to even when they are hurtful to us. Things like guilt, shame, fear, feeling inadequate—the list of things we humans can hold onto even when it hurts us is astoundingly long.