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Lent, a Heart Check-up

Not long ago we were fortunate enough to attend a conference with many clergy from around the country. One of them said something that has really stuck with us. He said that when he talked to children in his church, he told them that asking God for forgiveness was like putting Bactine on your heart: God's forgiveness soothes the heart and helps it heal.

We liked that simple imagery because it makes the tasks of the Lenten season more understandable. You see, Lent began a few weeks ago in the Christian Church. It is composed of forty days, set aside as a time each year when we are asked to fearlessly examine our hearts, finding the dents, cracks, nicks and scars caused by our ramble through this rough and tumble world. During Lent we take responsibility for our part in the wounding of our own hearts, and for our part in wounding the hearts of others in our world. We ask God for forgiveness, and when possible, we make restitution,

Now that may not sound like a barrel of laughs – all that self-examination and admission of wrong-doing. But it's not meant to be a time of anguish. It's meant to be a time that allows release of the heavy guilt we carry, a time that heals our broken hearts, and a time that restores our dearest hopes. All of which helps us to forge our way toward a deeper, truer, kinder, and more responsible faithfulness.

But if self-examination of the very deepest and darkest recesses of our hearts is to be done, and if forgiveness is to be asked from God, where do we begin?

Frederick Buechner, in his book, *Wishful Thinking*, suggests that in Lent we should ask ourselves five questions: 1) When you look at your face in the mirror, what do you see in it that you most like, and what do you see in it that you most deplore? 2) If you had but one last message to leave to the handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be, in twenty-five words or less? 3) Of all the things you have done in life, which is the one you would most like to undo, and which is the one that makes you proudest to remember? 4) Is there any person or cause in the world, for which if circumstances demanded it, you would be willing to die? 5) And finally, if this were the last day of your life, what would you do with it?

These are probing questions for this Lent. These are questions that lead us to an examination of our hearts. May the forty days of this Lenten season bring you a helpful heart check-up, and enough soothing of the broken places to speed your healing. And with healed hearts, may you feel the strength of purpose and hope return, so that you may, in turn, help others heal, as we all make our way toward Easter.