



By Pastor Koenig

Long before any of us were born, our ancestors practiced and cultivated a particular tradition, and passed it on from generation to generation through story and experience. Though it has taken on many forms over the years, at its root it has not changed, and those who continue the tradition are convinced of its reliability and success.

Even though it has been understood for so many lifetimes, however, it is still nearly impossible to *perfect* this tradition. Why? Because no one can properly describe the exact timbre necessary when thumping a melon to determine if it is really ripe! And these days, the tradition has been complicated further with so many genetic modifications to choose from—a melon is no longer a melon, the stripes are too difficult to read, and besides, we simply don't have time to carry on our melon-thumping tradition. Bottom line: "You never really know the heart of a melon until you slice it open."

Nicodemus had similar intuitions when he first approached Jesus in the dead of night. "What do you mean, 'be born again'?" he asked, as if to say, "Can't I tell who's righteous by their stripes, and can't I infer their inner qualities by thumping on their intellect?" But Jesus replies, "Just as you can't tell where the wind comes from or where it blows, so it is with the Holy Spirit." You simply never know how, when, where, or why the Holy Spirit works—or doesn't work—inside someone. Bottom line: You never really know the heart of a person until you 'slice it open.'

That is precisely what we do during Lent. It is a time of 'slicing open' our innermost selves, of laying bare to God what's really at our core. We confess in public fashion (especially on Ash Wednesday) that we are not really so ripe inside, although we would like to be. It is an admission of our humanity, of our imperfect timbre in God's world. ***But it is also an act of freedom.*** Through Lent, we free ourselves from the expectation that each of us can somehow be the best melon in the bunch. We free ourselves from trying to judge each other through intellectual thumping instead of confessional community. We free ourselves from ourselves, and rediscover who God is, and where God stands, in our lives. So Lent can have a beautiful timbre as well.

As we rediscover ourselves this Lenten season, let us embrace the many wonderful opportunities we will have to grow and ripen into our discipleship. Praise be to the God who loved us before we were born, who picked us out of the bunch to be God's people, and who abides with us as we are! Go in peace. Serve the Lord! Thanks be to God!