

Joel 2: 1 - 2, 12 - 17
Psalm 51: 1 - 17
Year B, Ash Wednesday

2 Corinthians 5:20b - 6: 10
Matthew 6: 1 - 6, 16 - 21
February 25, 2009

Stinky Pants

“As a father cares for his children, so does the Lord care for those who fear him.” (Psalm 51:13) On this night of acknowledging our sinfulness and launching into a season of penitence, I am drawn to this line of intimacy and love. As a father cares for his children, so does the Lord care for those who fear him.

It all started innocently enough. Whenever my mom changed diapers, she would refer to them as "stinky pants"- most certainly an accurate if not descriptive euphemism. Well, when you grow up, like I did, with a brother who is two and a half years younger and a sister who is three and a half year your junior, you tend to hear the phrase a lot. I cannot claim that I was so much older or wiser at the time, but I had made it through the potty training process and was, luckily, not old enough to actually have to deal with changing those "stinky pants". Something tells me I will not be able to avoid this reality in the near future! “Stinky pants, as I said before, was and still is a pretty accurate phrase.

We lived on a street with a number of other kids and used to play together often. As long as the weather was good, we were outside playing (a note to the younger generation- this is before video games and cable so that was the ONLY choice). One day we were playing with the kids on the block- I cannot even remotely recall the game or what we were doing- and something happened. To be honest, I can't even recall what happened. All I can remember is that one of the other kids on the block made my little brother

angry- very angry. Well, when you are young enough to have your diaper changed, you are certainly not very adept at fighting or cursing or really anything that has to do with conflict, but my brother proved himself inventive if nothing else. In his rage for this now forgotten transgression, my brother created a curse that still makes my family laugh today. Quite simply he said, "I hope you and your whole family get 'stinky pants'!!!"

Today we begin that desert of the Christian calendar called Lent. It is the 40 days leading to Easter in which every Christian is called upon to give up something and turn to God. In that 6 week period, we are all asked to remove those barriers in our life and clear the path to God.

In a way, Lent is a time when we are all told that we have stinky pants. We are reminded that we have made mistakes, that we have put things between each other, that we have sought other idols- in short, that we have sinned. Lent is a 40 day spiritual diaper change if you will. The time has simply come to clean ourselves up before we reach that holiest time of year- Easter.

Our biggest problem in the church is obsessively focusing on our faults. We have certainly failed. We have not hit the mark. We have hurt our friends and our families and everyone we love. We have to try to do better. The problem is that we focus so relentlessly on those errors at times that we cannot hear God's call to us, "As a father cares for his children, so does the Lord care for those who fear him." God loves us as children. To focus purely on our sin is to effectively throw the baby out with the dirty diaper. As the collect so beautifully states, God does not desire our death. None of you would get angry at your child for making "stinky pants". You certainly hoped and prayed and

worked toward the day when potty training occurred. God wants the same for us. We make error after error. I am sure God grows weary of many of our mistakes, but God cares for us as God's beloved children. God wants us to get up and try again.

So, the challenge is not necessarily to give something up as you might conventionally hear. On the contrary, the hardest part of Lent is trying to, back to my slightly twisted metaphor, change your own spiritual diaper. We are all called upon to make changes in our lives that will bring us closer to God- by getting the negatives out of our lives and adding things like prayer, thanksgiving and love.

So, as we begin this season of Lent, let us all move to make our relationship with God closer and pray that the curse of "stinky pants" pass over us and our families!