

2025 Lenten Lunch

In the Episcopal Church (and some other traditions represented here), there is a word we “put away” for Lent. A joyful word, a word that means “Let us praise God!”

It’s this word (ALLELUIA)

And yes, this “ban” as one of my Chapel Kids calls in, includes the alternate spelling (HALLELUJAH)

For years, I joked that the way my niece Sarah said it when she was three was acceptable, and was known to let out a hearty “LA-LAY-LOO-LAAAAA!” when the moment called for it.

I have in past years invited our Chapel Kids to color and decorate the little slips of paper with “that word” on it, and invited them to hide them around the church or take them home and tuck it away for someone to find. There are some on your tables, and I invite you to do the same. Take it home with you and see where it ends up.

We are still coming across them, tucked away in a book in the library or in the pocket of a robe about to go through the wash. One clever child even figured out which page of the Gospel book I would be using on Easter Sunday and tucked in there. It amused several of

the people who watch the livestream to see me laugh in delight as I held it up for all to see. I had found my (ALLELUIA)!

Last year, my colleague here, Sandy Williams, taught our Chapel Kids the ASL sign for it (*have her demonstrate*). I have to tell you, it wasn't just the kids who enthusiastically put their hands in the air. A stranger might have thought this bunch of staid Episcopalians gone positively Pentecostal!

I want to take advantage of the fact that there are plenty of you here who do NOT have any such 'rule' so maybe you can help me out. When I lift my sign, feel free to hold up your own (ALLELUIA) or use the sign or shout it out for me. Okay?

So two weeks ago, I was sitting at the front table when Fayre was speaking, and two of those very Chapel Kids were present. After lunch, I was encouraging them to turn over their placemats and draw, but they were hesitant. So I took mine, tore a piece off the end, wrote something on it in "fancy letters," rolled it up like a scroll and handed it across the table to the boy.

His sister's gasp as she realized what I had written was matched only by the *scandalized* look on his face as he unrolled it and read the word (ALLELUIA). It led to adults laughing (or trying desperately *NOT* to laugh) and

children scolding which was, I am so sorry Fayre, a bit of a disruption!

(Sandy got us seats at the back of the room last week, having learned I cannot be trusted to behave.)

I hadn't realized just how fully these kids had embraced the practice. They are serious about putting away their (ALLELUIA!) for Lent. AND how eager they are to welcome it back come Easter morning!

Some of the adults in my congregation also feel its absence every year. They push back about the theology or logic of the whole thing. You see, in the Episcopal Church, we say "the Sundays don't count"—meaning you can break your Lenten fast from chocolate or coffee or swear words or whatever you gave up—because *every* Sunday is meant to be a little Easter.

So (as Patty rightly argues) if the Sundays don't count, why don't we say (ALLELUIA!)?!

And I readily agree that it doesn't really make sense. It's mostly just a traditional practice, a verbal fast which helps us appreciate it more by its absence. One of the best parts of Lent for me is realizing just how often in the course of the week I say (ALLELUIA). It makes me that much more aware of all the reasons I have to be grateful whatever the season.

But it's also a way of acknowledging that there are days when it can be really hard to find our (ALLELUIA).

It can feel balled up and hidden in the bottom of a pile of stinky laundry. It can feel like it slipped out of our pocket and disappeared as we walked down the hospital corridor. It can feel like we've gone hoarse and even if we *tried* the word just wouldn't come out.

That is part of why we observe Lent—to remind ourselves that the story of our faith has some really dark chapters. Lent is a time to acknowledge that all is *not* right with the world. To push us to admit that there is an awful lot of violence and hatred and division. There is sorrow and loss and betrayal, and we feel utterly powerless to stop it.

Lent admits that death is part of the story, whether we want to admit it or not. Our faith does not shield us from suffering.

That brings me to the one place—the *one* time—when we Episcopalians are allowed to say it during Lent. In fact, we are required to do so.

It is in the burial service, at the end, when we are commending our loved one into God's welcoming embrace. It is a moment when we are reminded that

this word is not just a sort of holy WOOHOO! Or
YIPPEEE!

It is a word of victory. A word that gives us the strength
and courage and hope to defy the powers of darkness
that try to overwhelm us. It is a protest song. A shout of
triumph that denies death the last word.

Here is what we say in that moment.

You only are immortal, our creator and maker;
and we are mortal, formed of the earth,
and to earth shall we return.

For so did you ordain when you created me, saying,
“You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

All of us go down to the dust;
yet even at the grave we make our song:

Alleluia,

ALLELUIA,

ALLELUIA!