Column

People collect all sorts of items. I am no exception. In the attic and around the house, I have cameras, ranging from an early Kodak Brownie Hawkeye to a pre-war German fold-out bellows model, as well as a few more modern ones. Most would still work if film could be found.

Simple cameras, such as the Brownie Hawkeye, are point-and-shoot. Mechanisms to adjust the lens speed and aperture opening are non-existent
On more expensive models, however, it is possible to adjust both, along with the capability of focusing the image seen through the lens. With a few twists and turns, a blur takes on form and shape and becomes crisp.

It is these latter cameras about which I am thinking today. That distorted image seen before any adjustment is made might be compared to what at times can be found in the viewfinder of our life. Our perception of what is true and lasting and indeed of God Himself gets blurred. What brings about this

distortion is the hustle and bustle of daily life. Our lenses need refocusing to get back to the true image.

One opportunity for bringing about such an adjustment comes in the season of the church year in which we now find ourselves. Lent, a season of 40 days excluding Sundays, leads us to Easter. It is a time to refocus our lives back on those things that have ultimate value, those things that extend beyond the short years of this earthly life all the way to eternity, ultimately back to God Himself.

When we do this – focus our attention on God – we discover first who we are. In our baptism into Christ, we were made adopted sons and daughters. What is true of Christ, the natural Son, becomes true of us as adopted sons and daughters. The old catechism found in the Book of Common Prayer spells out the spiritual status of the believer, "the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."

By focusing on God we also discover our duty to neighbor. Put another way, we get our vertical perspective as well as our horizontal right. We are to

love them in the sense of desiring their highest good. For those outside the fold of salvation, that means sharing the Gospel by word and example. For both those outside and in, it means rendering hands-on, practical service.

Further, focusing our attention on God calls us to cast away things in our lives which get in the way of loving and serving God and others. The world around us is a place of false values and material obsessions. It calls us to be true to ourselves and no one else. In Lent (and indeed at all other times), we are summoned to go in a different direction. To say to the world, the flesh and the devil – “Get thee hence, Satan."

Jesus speaks of getting things in a right order when he says: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). “These things” refer to the ordinary things of life: food, clothing and shelter . . . the things which so often preoccupy and cause us to take our focus off ultimate things.

Lent, a season going back to the second or third century, gives us an opportunity for getting things in a right order. During this season we are summoned to refocus our lives onto the One who alone brings true happiness, contentment and hope. Means of doing this include: slowing down, reading our Bibles, being faithful in public worship and being attentive to those around us in need.

The challenge is whether we shall take advantage of this opportunity. Will we be led by Madison Avenue or Christ the Saviour? The choice is ours.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we,worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness. may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Ash Wednesday, Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.