

LENT IS UPON US!

Once again the Lenten season is upon us. Knowing that I am a Christian you might wonder what I am “giving up” for Lent. It’s an appropriate question, but first I want to ask, “Why do need to give up anything?” What is the point of giving up something that we enjoy, are dependent upon or even addicted to if we are just going to resume this experience on Easter Sunday?

As Pastor Kathi (Campbell UMC) pointed out in Sunday’s [“Lent 2016” bulletin insert](#) (2/7/16), “fasting is only a spiritual practice if it brings you closer to God; otherwise it’s a diet.” “Fasting” can, depending on how we define the word, can include everything from a total fast once a week to “fasting” from one’s favorite beverage, food or dessert.

When I was a child I sometimes considered “giving up” candy for Lent. It was supposed to be good preparation for the events of Holy Week, especially the suffering and death of Jesus. I’m not sure that I ever made it all the way through Lent without having a few candy bars. However, I am fairly clear that “giving up” anything just for Lent or any other relatively short time, with the exception of a medical necessity, is not necessarily helpful along our spiritual journeys.

Simply “giving up” something does not automatically cause me to focus on the suffering of Jesus the Christ. Indeed, with just a little inattention to my spiritual journey I can turn this trivial exercise in “giving up” something I like into a self-centered experience. In effect, I can quietly boast to others that whatever I am “giving up” is good for me. As someone wrote, “It’s not all about you.”

Well, if “It” isn’t all about me, then who is it about? It is about God and our personal openness to God’s presence in our lives and in the Church. Of course, there are times when it is very difficult to focus on deepening our relationship with God in Jesus. Some of those times are caused by extraordinary stress brought on by sudden trauma, unexpected death, loss of a job, etc. However, quite honestly, the times when I was/am not growing in Christ are usually the result of my self-centeredness. I imagine that I am too busy to take time for prayer, worship or to use any of the other spiritual disciplines the Church offers us to help us along our journeys to God.

The hope that I as a Christian hold out for Lent, is that it will be a season of drawing closer to Jesus as we discover God both *in* Jesus and at work *through* Him. To believe in such a possibility is one thing. To actively experience it is another. When we do recognize the importance of following Jesus and decide that we want to live in the kingdom of heaven ([Matthew 5:3](#)), we need to realize that there are obstacles to such a life of faith. Some do not reveal themselves until we take that step in faith that takes us beyond simply “giving up” and choosing to “let go” of whatever blocks or slows our growth in Christ.

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