

## I'm Giving up Lent for Lent

Lent is a forty-day period leading up to Easter that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The word "Lent" comes from the old English word *lencten* which means lengthen...referring to the season of Spring and the associated longer hours of daylight. The duration of Lent is modeled after the forty days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness after his baptism and just before he began his ministry. Lent is a time of spiritual renewal and reflection through prayer, fasting (giving up something for Lent), and alms giving (charitable donations) in preparation for observing Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

It's important to remember that the primary purpose of Lent is to function as a time of honest reflection on our lives as followers of Jesus...to admit our failures and face our brokenness. We are to acknowledge where there is sin in our lives and experience the guilt of distancing ourselves from God through our words and actions. We then ask God's forgiveness, repent (promise to turn and lead a new life), and hope for God's continued gifts of mercy, compassion, understanding, and grace.

But, for me, Lent this year seems different. No, there's nothing wrong with reflection that leads to an enriched prayer life, abstinence from things that might be harming us or others, or generous donations to the church or other charities. And, yes, I'm still going to give up something for Lent. But, this year I've decided to give up Lent for Lent and here's why...

I recently gave a sermon on loving your enemies and as all of you were exiting the Chapel here's a comment I heard. "I don't have to worry about loving my enemies because I don't have any enemies." Oh, that we could all say that with conviction!

Now, I am pretty sure that I understand what this person meant. She was saying that there just isn't a particular individual...



not one single person that she would say was her enemy. I get it...I do. But, in that same sermon I spoke about how I didn't think Jesus addressed his comments about loving enemies to individuals but to groups. So, my thoughts began to go beyond individuals to groups of people and how they might be my enemies.

I decided that drug cartels and others who produced and sold drugs to young people leading to addiction and overdose deaths are my enemies. I thought about those who would get involved in human trafficking and ruin so many young lives as my enemies. I began to think about how leaders of nations who would send their young people to fight and die in war were my enemies. I began to single out those groups of people who would discriminate and oppress others because of their skin color or sexual orientation or gender identity. I focused on those who would not protect or support or value our elderly as my enemies. I set my anger on those who never live up to their commitments and shirk from their responsibilities. And, the list went on and on and I struggled to find any love in my heart for any of them.

But, this year I just can't stand to reflect on sins like these. This year I can't bear anymore guilt. This year is different. This year I feel totally surrounded by chaos, upheaval, death, and destruction. This is the year of Ukraine and Gaza and war among nations and among people. This is the year of political revenge and retribution. This is the year of chaos and confusion and change assaulting us from every direction. This is the year of aircraft colliding in midair. This is the year of fires destroying countless

homes with no insurance. This is the year of Hurricane Helene. This is the year that it may not be mentally healthy to reflect on our sins and how they might be adding to the problems of the world.

This year I just can't stand to admit the sin of my lack of love and wallow in the guilt that revelation will bring. So, you are not going to hear me push all the usual spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and alms giving this Lent. Instead I am going to give you a bit of pastoral care advice rather than spiritual advice.

This year why don't you join me in honoring God and preparing for Holy Week and Easter by taking care of yourself through these turbulent times by...

Wake up (everyday)

Sleep is important, but hiding under the covers is bad. Get on some sort of schedule for sleeping and waking.

Welcome the day (everyday)

Say "thank you" first thing when you wake. The night and day are still doing their thing, no matter what. You may feel defeated or scared but you are alive.

Walk (everyday)

Get fresh air and exercise. Move, be attentive to your world, pray or meditate as you go, or just put one foot in front of the other. Be with others (everyday)  
Don't isolate yourself. Reach out or connect with someone every single day. Volunteer to feed the hungry or read to children at the local library. Do good for and with others. Hang out with people you trust.

Work (most days, but take Sabbaths too!)

Keep doing your work. Do what you love. Practice your vocation. Focus on your own gifts and calling. Clean your house, rearrange your closets, take up a hobby.

Write (everyday, weekly, or often) Keep a journal of these days of Lent. Express

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Keep doing your work. Do what you love. Practice your vocation. Focus on your own gifts and calling. Clean your house, rearrange your closets, take up a hobby.

Write (everyday, weekly, or often) Keep a journal of these days of Lent. Express yourself as fully as you can in its pages. If you don't like writing, draw or weave or throw pots. Writing or art can clarify things for you.

Watch the news (as you are able)

You must stay informed. Use the mute button on your remote. Be cautious with sources. You don't need to know everything, but being aware of at least some things is important.

Weep (whenever)

Embrace whatever emotions come up...cry and laugh. Don't regret the tears and don't feel guilty about the joy — and all the feelings in between the two. If you have someone to talk to about your feelings, share what's going on.

Wonder (as much as possible)

Go out into nature, spend time at an art museum, listen to your favorite music, read books and poetry, get obsessed with space photos from the Webb telescope — anything that connects you to beauty and deepens your awareness of awe. Researchers have discovered that "awe leads to goodwill, cooperation, and a transformed sense of self as part of a community"

Wake up, welcome the day, walk (jog or run), be with others, work, write, watch the news, weep, and wonder. Take care of yourself. You are a child of God and all of

us here at the Chapel love you and wish you God's peace throughout Lent and beyond.

Peace,  
Pastor Paul

(For the above pastoral advice I am indebted to the N.I.H. website article, *What Can I Do to Cope After a Traumatic Event* and Diana Butler Bass', *Ten W's of Resilience.*)

