

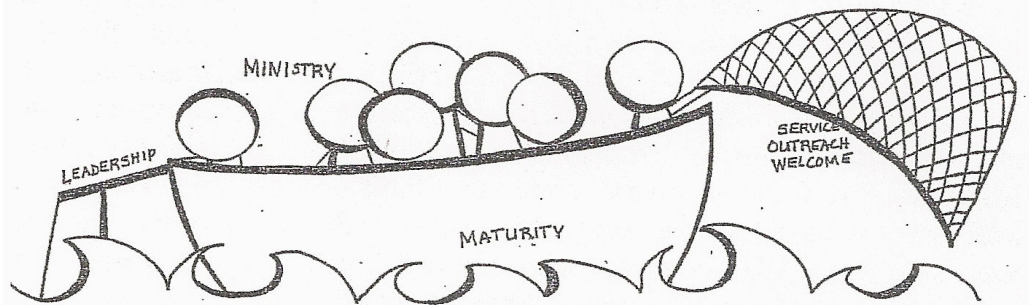
Pastor's Page

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Week 8

Take on Something for Lent



by Rev. Vern Kochlinger

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. So, are you giving up something for Lent? That has become somewhat of a tradition in some circles, hasn't it? It's almost like making a New Year's resolution.

Giving up something for Lent certainly follows the words of Jesus who said that if we want to count ourselves among His disciples, we must deny ourselves. I'm not sure that Jesus was trying to say that if we avoid eating chocolate for six weeks, for example, that somehow we are a "better" Christian. There's more to it than that, isn't there?

Consider a Different Approach

If you've read the title of this article, you may already have guessed where I am going with this (but please, keep reading!). Instead of "giving up something for Lent," how about "taking on something for Lent"? At the outset, I want to make sure you know that this wasn't my idea (not that I don't think it's a good one; I just want to give credit to the proper source). It came from Harry Wendt, the author of the Crossways material, with which some of you are familiar. Actually, I don't know that the idea originated with Dr. Wendt either, but I read about it

recently in an article he sent me (and thousands of others on his e-mail list). In some ways, it's not a new concept; perhaps it's just phrased differently.

Oftentimes, when someone decides to "give up something for Lent," it involves something worldly like a particular type of food (like candy), a certain activity (like watching TV), or something of enjoyment (like going to a movie). While someone could argue that giving up these kinds of things might be good for your health or your bank account, that same someone could ask, "What's this doing for your spiritual life?"

The "take on something" approach suggests that what you take on be something that is indeed spiritual. Some examples are prayer, devotions, Bible reading, worship, or meditation. It's easy to see how those can be of benefit to your spiritual life, right?

How about Combining the Two?

Instead of looking at this as an either/or, how about looking at this as a both/and? Let me give you some examples.

Instead of just giving up chocolate, how about adding to that a commitment to taking

*“ . . .giving up [something for Lent]
might be good for your health, [but] . . .,
‘What’s this doing for your spiritual life?’”*

in the food of God’s Word? Perhaps you eat chocolate an average of four times a week. How about giving that up and instead taking on a commitment to read a chapter in the Bible four times a week?

Instead of just giving up television, how about adding to that the goal of engaging your mind and heart in some serious, thought-provoking time with God? Suppose you watch television on average about three hours a day. How about replacing one hour of that with time spent in the study of a particular book of the Bible along with a study guide or commentary?

Instead of just giving up going to see a movie, how about replacing that activity with watching a Christian video with your children or grandchildren?

Maybe the idea of an equal swap (take away this; add that) is too regimented or restrictive for you. Here are some additional ideas for taking on something for Lent:

⤴ I commented to a Catholic acquaint-ance recently that I have really appreciated the commercials I have seen on television about returning to the Catholic Church. My only complaint is that we Lutherans aren’t doing it. There are some “Lutherans” who should consider “returning to church” also. Lent is an excellent time to do that. Why? Because Lent is where some serious spiritual rubber hits the road. Lent is a time when we are forced to consider what our relationship with God is all about. . . . Why did Jesus come into the world? . . . What exactly did He do for me? . . . What does He expect of me today?

⤴ Lent is a time when you may want to give special attention to the portion of the biblical narrative that details what Jesus experienced in the last twenty hours or so of

His life. This time is commonly called “The Passion of Jesus.” The sections in the Bible that cover Jesus’ Passion are Matthew 26:17 – 27:56; Mark 14:12 – 15:41; Luke 22:1 – 23:49; and John 13:1 – 19:37.

⤴ To take these first two ideas a step further, consider taking on the goal of worshiping regularly at one of our Wednesday Lenten services. It is somewhat “traditional” for Lutherans to have Lent be a time of focus on a part of Luther’s Small Catechism. So, we’re going to take on that tradition this year and focus on The Lord’s Prayer on these six Wednesdays. Martin Luther saw a natural division of this prayer into nine parts—an introduction, a conclusion, and seven petitions. We’ll take these nine parts and divide them among the six weeks. (I know that nine doesn’t divide evenly by six; I guess you’ll just have to see how we’ll solve that problem.) We’ll also include a series of readings that will include the narrative of Jesus’ Passion.

To make it easier and hopefully more enjoyable for you to attend our Wednesday services, we will have the option for you to attend each week at either 5:00 or 7:00 p.m. In addition to those worship options, a different group in our congregation will prepare a supper and serve from 5:30 to about 6:30. Hopefully, this time will also be an interactive time of fellowship as worshipers from both services can “break bread together.” And please note, normally, you won’t have to cook or clean up your evening meal. Isn’t that a great idea for “giving something up for Lent”? ☩

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