



Give up Lent?

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Madison, Wisconsin

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Create in me a clean heart O God, and put a new a steadfast spirit within me.
Amen.

During Lent, with the hope of cleansing and spiritual renewal, many Christians take on the ancient practice of **fasting**—giving up something in the spirit of sacrifice, with the hope of remembering the sacrifice of Jesus and of drawing closer to God.

Some people will fast from alcohol, or dessert. Some give up coffee, or meat, or fast food. Others fast from social media or TV or some form of technology.

Such fasts can indeed help us draw closer to God, but we need to remember that Lent isn't a diet program; it's a time of spiritual renewal, journeying with Jesus.

Scripture cautions us about doing religious deeds like fasting for the wrong reasons. In Isaiah 58, apparently religious leaders were ignoring massive injustice, so Isaiah boldly proclaimed the voice of God:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;

And in the gospel according to Matthew 6, Jesus urges his followers about doing charity, prayer, and fasting for the right reasons.

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell

you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So tonight is a good time for us to set an intention for Lent, to decide how to journey through this season, to consider fasting, to consider giving up something for Lent.

I have an unusual suggestion: **I invite you to consider giving up Lent for Lent.**

Let me explain: I got this idea from a recent webinar with author Diana Butler Bass. As she noted and as all of us know, over the past two years with Covid, we have given up much and lost much. Maybe we don't need more sacrifice and burden right now. Maybe we don't need to intentionally make life more challenging to experience God in this season. Maybe we don't need to give up things for Lent.

Maybe instead we need to find ways to celebrate life and live as best as we can, which can include chocolate or coffee or a glass of wine or connecting with friends on Facebook.

Maybe instead of putting all our energy into self-denial we do some non-traditional Lent things like put our energy into seeking out meaning and purpose and joy in life, earnestly seek first God's Kingdom, look for the good and find ways to enjoy life—even as we ponder our sin, even as we pray “create in me a clean heart O God”, even as we follow Jesus to the cross.

So I invite you in this season of Lent

To listen to Jesus, as we read John's gospel

To think about following Jesus, as we reflect on devotions

To welcome the life that God offers us in Jesus

To take the big bold step of talking about Jesus

With the hope of being more faithful Christians,

With the hope of being more fully alive. Amen.