



Pastor's Page

Time to give up?

As a young boy a friend of mine went along to his local Sunday school for the first time at his parents' insistence. It was mid February and the teacher was asking the youngsters what they were going to give up for Lent. When it came round to my friend's turn he said "Sunday school"!

The word 'Lent' comes from an old English word meaning 'lengthen'. This word was used because Lent is observed in spring, when the days begin to get longer -Amen! (I think this is one reason why I love it so much) The 40 weekdays of Lent (not counting Sundays because that was the day that Jesus rose again) begins on Ash Wednesday (last Wednesday) and concludes on Easter Saturday. This period of time corresponds with Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry when he was tempted mercilessly by the devil. Originating in the fourth century of the church, the season of Lent became an opportunity for Christians to prepare for Easter by focussing on repentance and also the time of preparation for those who were to be baptized on Easter Sunday. This involved a period of concentrated Bible study and prayer.

Now as evangelical Christians we believe that it is 'by grace that we have been saved through faith - and this not from ourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no-one can boast' (Ephesians 2:8,9) So this makes 'penance' (voluntary self-punishment in order to atone for wrongdoing) unbiblical and unnecessary. All we need to do is turn away from our sins and turn to Christ for salvation. Christ's sacrificial death on the cross was sufficient to bring lost me back to God. This is good news indeed! But it was a mighty battle for Jesus to win at Calvary and the desert experience prepared him for this ultimate victory.

I believe that the season of lent gives us a great opportunity to reflect in a deep way on all that Jesus has done for us. And in response we may want to give some things up. Consider for instance this *Lenten Reflection*

Give up complaining—focus on gratitude.
Give up pessimism—become an optimist.
Give up harsh judgments—think kindly thoughts.
Give up worry—trust Divine Providence.
Give up discouragement—be full of hope.
Give up bitterness—turn to forgiveness.
Give up hatred—return good for evil.
Give up negativism—be positive.
Give up anger—be more patient.
Give up pettiness—become mature.
Give up gloom—enjoy the beauty that is all around you.
Give up jealousy—pray for trust.
Give up gossiping—control your tongue.
Give up sin—turn to virtue.
Give up giving up—hang in there!

As Christians we aren't called to give things up just for lent – but for life!

21st February 2010