

Sermon Series: Giving It Up!
Give It Up for Jesus!
Meditation Delivered on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2015
By Rev. Donna L. Martin
Text: Matthew 4:1-11

Two women were heading in to Ash Wednesday services and began discussing what they and their families were giving up for Lent this year. The first woman said: "I'm giving up desserts, Burt is giving up alcohol and the kids are giving up video games. What about you, Carol? What are you giving up for Lent this year?" Carol thought for a moment and then replied: "Me? I'm just giving up." (<http://www.chathammethodist.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Feb.-24th-2013-Give-It-Up.pdf>)

Sometimes I think that is how many of us approach the season of Lent. We think of the years past and realize our attempts at fasting from this or that have been about as successful as our New Year's resolutions or our commitment to the latest best-selling diet. For many of us these attempts at doing without are but a flash-in-the-pan, glittering promises of a new and improved life, that fade quickly. Because of this there are some of us like Carol who give up before we ever get started.

The tradition of fasting from food, alcohol, or anything you devote a lot of your time to is derived from Jesus' forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. So our efforts to abstain from certain foods, alcohol, chocolate, Facebook, video games, or cursing can be noble pursuits. And I do not want to discourage you from them, but if attempting to do the same things you have failed to do or have feebly done in the past makes you feel like giving up, then we need to try something different. Wasn't it Albert Einstein that said, "Doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results is the definition of insanity?"

So I propose that we approach Lent in a different manner this year and look at giving something up in a different sort of way. And although it might not be the kind of giving up or fasting Jesus did in his 40 day wilderness experience, it will be the kind of giving up he did during the three years of his public ministry. It will be the kind of giving up that made it possible for him to have the strength to endure the cross and be our savior. It can be the kind of giving up that gives us the strength to be committed disciples of Jesus Christ. So this year instead of looking at giving up things like red meat, chocolate, cursing, or alcohol, over the six Sundays of Lent we will be

looking at giving up things like control, expectations, superiority, enemies, our lives, popularity and death.

You know, in the entertainment industry it is not uncommon for the host of an event to say something like, "Let's give it up" for someone like The Beatles, Bruce Springsteen or Beyonce (depending on your age). This means we're supposed to enthusiastically applaud and cheer for the performer. The phrase suggests that when we "give it up", we hold nothing back. And that's exactly the kind of "giving it up" that Jesus did for us. Jesus "gave it up" for God's divine plan for salvation. He gave up his will and his life for our sake, holding nothing back

(<http://www.chathammethodist.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Feb.-24th-2013-Give-It-Up.pdf>).

So I'm going to ask you to do something for Lent that will bring you closer to the kinds of sacrifices Jesus made during his ministry, the ones that enabled him to give it up for us. It will be difficult. Trying new things always is. But I can also promise that if you make these sacrifices you will find significant joy in the end. Because as paradoxical as it seems, the more willing you are to release something (give it up), the more you will gain. Because when we let go of some part of our life that has a grip on us, we become open to new possibilities for living greatly.

So I pray that as you go through Lent, your "giving it up" (however you choose to do it) is more than just going through the motions. I pray that your experience brings you to the place of giving it up for the events that changed all our lives: Jesus' death and resurrection. Because Lent and Easter are not about deprivation so that we can better enjoy the candy or the ham-and-potato dinner with coconut cream pie at the end of our 40-day journey. Lent and Easter are about the sacrifice that was necessary to break down the doors of hell and death and entering into the kingdom of heaven on earth (Give It Up!: A Lenten Study for Adults by Dottie Escobedo-Frank, itunes ebook Loc 76 or 1001). So tonight as we observe Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lenten journey, you are invited to "give it up" to the one who has given it all for us. Amen.