

Mark 8:31-38
What Are You Willing to Give Up?
WRCOB 2.23.20

Next Sunday is the First Sunday in Lent.

Historically, the Brethren didn't follow the Christian calendar.

The Christian Calendar was a bit too "High-Church" for them.

They considered everyday a day to celebrate
The life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

However, recently Brethren have begun to include
Parts of the Christian calendar into
The life cycle of the church.

The Season of Lent is one of them.

The Lenten Season is forty days long minus Sundays
Leading up to Easter Sunday.

The length correlates to Israel's forty years in the wilderness
And Jesus' forty days of temptation.

Its purpose is to prepare the church for what's to come
The pain, the suffering and the sorrow
Jesus endured for our sake.

Participants of Lent prepare for this
By prayer, repentance, fasting, and self-denial.

Self-denial, however, seems to be the choice of disciplines.

Like this story from Harold Buetow.

A priest was walking home in the dark
When a robber jumped out at him.

The robber pulled a gun and demanded
"Your money or your life!"

But when the priest reached into his coat pocket
The robber noticed the clergy collar and said
"Oh, you're a priest. Never mind, sorry."

Trying to be kind, the priest offered the robber a candy bar
He remembered he had in his pocket.

But the robber shook his head, "No thank you, Father.
I've given up candy for Lent."

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You've heard it.

For Lent I'm giving up sweets
Second helpings
Dessert
Caffeine
Chocolate
Potato chips

I'm giving up from my usual double latte for coffee black!

Actually, the Season of Lent begins to sound
More and more like a class on self-improvement.

Instead of what it is . . . a spiritual discipline!

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Looking at our Bibles just before today's Scripture Lesson
Jesus asks the disciples a question.

Who do people say that I am?

They answer some say John the Baptist
Others say Elijah
Still others say one of the prophets.

But what about you?
Jesus asks
Who do you say that I am?

And Peter answers you are the Christ.

Jesus tells them not to say anything.

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Strange stuff.

So far, the disciples have had it relatively easy.

They've followed Jesus around from place to place.

They've witnessed some pretty cool stuff.

They've heard Jesus teach about the kingdom of God
In his sermons and parables.

They've seen Jesus exorcize demons
Heal lepers, cure the blind

They've heard him criticize the legalism
He saw in the religious folks of the day.

And they've seen the broken in spirit
The down-hearted, the despairing
Transformed to people of hope and promise.

So far, things have gone well enough.

It hasn't been too bad being a follower of Jesus.

Well, the travel and accommodations could be better!

Certainly not the five star hotels they were hoping for.

But pretty-good all the same.

Up to now that is.

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Today's Scripture Lesson is the first
Of Jesus' three passion predictions in Mark's Gospel.

Jesus says things are going to get ugly real soon.

What he faces will take all the self-discipline, self-denial
And all the courage he can gather.

For he is facing his own death.

But he faces the upcoming suffering and death
In the faith that it's not in vain.

And from our perspective we know that it wasn't.

For his death is the doorway to life
His own, and all who dare to follow.

Without the Crucifixion there can be no Resurrection.

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Jesus told Peter
He told his disciples
He told the crowds that day
And he tells us today

That self-denial is part-and-parcel of Christian discipleship.

Followers are to set their minds on the things of God
Even if it means sacrifice.

The Season of Lent represents this.

In Lent we recognize Jesus' anguished journey
To the cross of suffering and shame

And also our willingness to take up our crosses
For the sake of the Kingdom of God.

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*At the very heart of the Christian gospel is a cross--the
symbol of suffering and sacrifice, of hurt and pain and
humiliation and rejection.*

I want no part of the Christian message which does not call me to involvement, requires of me no sacrifice, takes from me no comfort, requires of me less than the best I have to give. The duty of a Christian is to be faithful, not popular or successful (Donald Wildmon).

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Simply put, the Season of Lent

Is a season of self-denial for Christ's sake.

And so the question is

Why do we give something up for Lent?

Is it because it's a good excuse to go on a diet?

Because it proves we have good self-discipline?

Or because we want to prove how spiritual we are?

Is it because we have in mind the things of God?

Or do we consider the Season of Lent at all?

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Maybe the better question is not

“What will we give up for Lent?”

But, “What will we take up for Lent?”

Jesus said, ³⁴ **“If anyone would come after me, he must DENY himself and TAKE UP his cross and follow me.**

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The Schwab Center for Investment Research
Conducted a study in 2011
I know a bit outdated for sure..

In the study, they showed
That giving up potato chips for lunch for one year
Saved \$176.80.

Giving up 2 doughnuts/week
Could boost your nest egg by \$6,552.26
In two decades.

Switching from a double latte with whipped cream
To regular coffee
Could save up to \$429/year.

Financial benefits are obvious.

The health benefits are, too.

Dropping potato chips eliminate 10,000 calorie/year.

If you eat a bagel with cream cheese 3X/week
And you drop the cream cheese

You toss out 54,000 calories from your diet/year
And save \$7,371.29, over a twenty year period.

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So the important thing is not only what we'll give up
But what we'll take up in Lent.

Many will give up something during the Season of Lent.

But what will we take up in its place?

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Giving up chocolate, potato chips, double lattes
For Lent is all well and good.

But that's just half of it.

What will we take up in its place?

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If you GIVE up your favorite Netflix series for Lent, good!
You can pick it up after Easter.

Instead, TAKE UP your coat

Grab your keys and get in the car

And go visit someone who's lonely.

If you will GIVE up sweets, great!

Now, TAKE UP a piece of paper

Figure how much money you'll save

And write a check to the local Food Bank.

Ask yourself what you can GIVE UP

To TAKE UP the cause of Christ.

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I might have said this before

But it's a story worth repeating.

The Brethren Dan West was invited

To eat at a minster's home.

The pastor's wife fixed a scrumptious meal.

When she brought out a beautiful cake for dessert
Dan West said, "I'm sorry, I can't eat this."

"I made a vow that as long as there are
Starving children in the world
I will not indulge myself in eating dessert."

Dan West denied himself and not just for Lent.

But the inspiring thing about Dan West is this:

He not only GAVE UP dessert
He TOOK UP the cause
Of alleviating hunger in the world.

He started by encouraging Brethren farmers
To donate a heifer to send off to impoverished P.R.

And then following WW2
Through the Brethren Service Center
He shipped loads of animals
To post-war Europe.

Heifer International
Though no longer a Brethren agency
Continues to carry out the vision of Dan West.

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How about giving something up for Lent?

Sweets, second helpings, dessert
Caffeine, chocolate, potato chips
Double latte?

But let's not just GIVE something up
Let's TAKE UP something as well.

How would it be if each of us gave up something
I don't care what it is . . . something.

And with the savings from each of these sacrifices
We collectively send it off to a good cause?

A little something extra
Digging just a little deeper
For the cause of Christ.

To me, I don't really care what it is . . .
Caritas, Haiti Mission, Nigeria Crisis Fund
A special water resource project in Africa.

I invite the board to consider a special offering
For this Season of Lent
Beginning next Sunday.

Thomas à Kempis wrote:

Jesus has many who love his kingdom in heaven, but few who bear his cross. He has many who desire comfort, but few who desire suffering.

He finds many to share his feast, but few his fasting. All desire to rejoice with him, but few are willing to suffer for his sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the cup of his passion. Many admire his miracles, but few follow him in the humiliation of the cross.

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Today, we take the Bread and Cup
Symbols of Christ's suffering and death.

The Table is before you.

Come, not because you are strong
But because you are weak.

Come, not because any goodness of your own
Gives you a right to come
But because you need mercy and help.

Come because you love the Lord a little
And would like to love him more.

Come, because he loved you and gave himself for you.

Come, just as you are
But be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Come.