



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Lent is a fascinating time in the church year that Lutherans and other Protestants only somewhat appreciate. When you go to your online dictionary you will find that the first definition of LENT is a past tense or past participle of to Lend, a verb. Second comes the definition that we use to express these forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Lent is a season of fasting and penitence in preparation for Easter Sunday. The word Lent has origins in other languages that suggest springtime or the lengthening of daylight hours. Now wouldn't that be nice, especially if you are as tired of these cold winter days as I am.

Here at CTS we observe Lent for the forty days, but that was not always the case for Christianity. In early times there was only a short period of repentance prior to Easter that was observed. In the 7th century, the season began to grow and today it is 40 days. A number to remind people of the duration of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. And if you do count the days from today until Easter Sunday you will see that there are actually more than 40 days. 46 to be exact. That is because Sundays during Lent are not counted. They are mini-Easters all their own.

I remember when I was younger and in school I would see my Roman Catholic friends coming to class with a sooty mark on their foreheads. My neighbors would make a big deal about what they ate during Lent or what they were giving up, as they were practicing Catholics. And then there was the news media, yes even in the 60's they showed the Mardi Gras in New Orleans on Fat Tuesday. The bakery down the street made their famous paczki and the line

would be long to get these special sweet treats all to be consumed before Lent began.

And now that brings me to our service tonight. What does Lent mean for us today? Of course, it is still the church season in which we prepare for Easter Sunday. It is a special time for prayer and reflection. It is a time of confession and self-denial. One of the sentences I read this week said, "Lent is an excuse to be better." Some how that really resounded with me. I think this year, I am going to try to do better in all that I do. Maybe not make huge strides or deny myself chocolate for 40 days, but just be better, be a better person, a better disciples of Jesus.

If we all make that commitment to be better, it would look different for each of us. Eat less, exercise more, no swearing even when the guy in front of you cuts you off, give more, pray more often, criticize less. All those little things that make us who we are, we can strive to do better.

A few suggestions I found in an old sermon by Rev Dr David Leininger were as follows.

- *GIVE UP grumbling.* Only constructive criticism. No moaning, groaning and complaining.
- *GIVE UP 10 to 15 minutes in bed and replace them with a time of prayer.*
- *GIVE UP looking at other people's worst points.* Concentrate on their best attributes. Overlook the shortcomings of others.
- *GIVE UP speaking unkindly about others and about situations.* Be more understanding and check your sharp tongue at the door.
- *GIVE UP hatred of anyone or anything.* Concentrate on the discipline of love.
- *GIVE UP your worries and anxieties.* Now that is a tough one for me. I love to worry. Trust God instead and stop using up your energy on something you cannot fix.
- *GIVE UP TV one night a week.* Make a call to a shut in instead. Give someone the gift of your time and attention. And if you want to get extra credit stop watching the news every other day. See if that does not change your attitude.
- *GIVE UP buying anything non-essential.* Donate the left-over money at the end of the week to God. Help others meet their basic needs with your abundance.

These are just some of Pastor Leininger's suggestions. I am sure that you can think of many others that would better suit your struggles in life. But at least give some thought to using Lent this year to be and do better.

And folks the good news is that we do not have to do this alone. Find a partner, a buddy and work a plan to be better together. Better disciples of Jesus. Live the abundant life He offers to all His children. After all it is the Lord who offers us rest when we are weary and carrying heavy burdens. Matthew 11:25-30.

And as we come to the Lord's table this evening, with the ashes on our foreheads, that remind us of sin and death, we are made new in by the death and resurrection of Jesus. By God's grace His promises of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ Jesus are ours. Thanks be to God! **AMEN**