

March 1, 2017

Ash Wednesday  
*Don't Give Up!*  
Luke 9:18-26

**Opening words:** We are instructed this evening from the Gospel of Luke. The author of this book is never mentioned by name. However, we do know certain things about him. He was probably Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture, and a physician by trade. He wrote this Gospel and its companion, Acts, written about the year A.D. 70. The outline of the book is geographical. The first section revolves around Jesus's time in Galilee. The second section revolves around Jesus's time in Judea. The third section revolves around Jerusalem. This evening we find Jesus in Galilee. Our message for this evening is called *Don't Give Up!* Our Gospel reading is Luke 9:18-26.

**Luke 9:18-26** Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"<sup>19</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."<sup>20</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah."<sup>21</sup> Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.<sup>22</sup> And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."<sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.<sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.<sup>25</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?<sup>26</sup> Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

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Did you know 24% of all Americans observe the season of Lent? I hope they know the truth. Lent is not a season of self-deprivation, it is a season of spiritual renewal. If you are ready to begin this great journey of Lent with me, say, "**Amen!**"

We begin our Lenten journey this evening in the ninth chapter of Luke. Do you remember the story? Jesus had grown to celebrity status. Everyone was talking about him. Everyone wanted something from him. Everyone was guessing about his identity. However, Jesus was not interested in everyone else. Jesus was interested in the disciples. Jesus wanted to know what they thought about him? So, he asked them the question that changed everything, *who do you say I am?* The chatty disciples grew strangely silent. It is not that they don't have an opinion. It is that they don't want to be wrong. It is Peter who answered first and correctly. Jesus is God's Messiah. Instead of Jesus renting a billboard to announce his identity, Jesus asks the disciples not to tell anyone. His messiahship was to be kept a secret. The reason is simple. That generation

misunderstood the word *Messiah*. They longed for a military Messiah to liberate them from foreign rule. Instead, Jesus was a spiritual Messiah who came to liberate them from sin itself. Jesus says it clearly but the disciples don't listen. As the spiritual Messiah, Jesus will suffer, be rejected and die. However, that is not the end of the story. You know how the story ends. In the end, Jesus will be resurrected. The power of the empty tomb is such a glorious thing. Jesus invites others to share in his glory. However, if you are going to follow Jesus then you must be completely committed to him. People traditionally give up things for Lent to show the world they are completely committed to Jesus. By your presence here this evening, I am assuming you have decided to follow Jesus too. If you have decided to follow Jesus, say, "**Amen!**" So, let me ask you this question:

What are going to give up for Lent? Many in our area give up something for Lent. Maybe you are giving up one of these things? The list changes from generation to generation. Is anyone here giving up:

1. Chocolate or Sweets
2. Alcohol
3. Smoking
4. Fast Food
5. Swearing
6. Social Media
7. Shopping
8. Sports
9. Caffeine
10. Sex (Never mind, I don't want to know!)

Can I be honest with you? I normally don't give up anything for Lent, but I don't think it is a bad thing. If you know of someone who gives up something for Lent, say, "**Amen!**"

Unlike Christmas and Easter, Lent has not crossed over into the secular world. The reason is obvious. Christmas and Easter emphasize receiving something. Lent emphasizes giving up something. There is nothing wrong with a little self-discipline. However, there are some things you should never give up. It is those things that grab our attention during this sacred season. The things we should never give up are the spiritual disciplines. You should never give up:

- 1. Prayer** When was the last time you prayed? 55% of Americans pray daily. That number escalates to 88% when a loved one is facing hardship.
- 2. Fasting** When was the last time you fasted? Do you understand the concept of fasting? Fasting creates time with God.

3. **Worship** Is worship a priority in your life, or is it something you do when your calendar is clear?
4. **Meditation** This is hard to do because time is limited. When was the last time you had time to just think about God and his mysterious ways?
5. **The Bible** When was the last time you read the Bible for your own edification?

I am going to look at each one individually starting this Sunday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, the First Sunday of Lent, and ending on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Fifth Sunday of Lent. I hope you don't miss a single message, because each one of these disciplines is vital to your spiritual health. Remember, Lent is not a season of self-deprivation, it is a season of spiritual renewal. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring." Excluding Sundays because every Sunday is a little Easter, Lent is a forty-day period. Why forty days? Because, Jesus fasted forty days before being tempted by Satan. Lent begins today, March 1, and ends on Holy Saturday, April 15. What are you doing to give up for Lent? Maybe this is a better question: What are you not going to give up for Lent? Never forget it. Lent is not a season of self-deprivation, it is a season of spiritual renewal.

Will you pray with me?