

February 26, 2017

Ash Wednesday

Give Up!

Matthew 16:21-28

Opening words: How many times have you been asked the question, what are you giving up for Lent? It's a good question. Many in our area do give up something for Lent because it is a Roman Catholic tradition. The idea of giving up something for Lent is based on Matthew 16:24, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*" So, giving up something for Lent is about self-denial. It is not a second chance at your broken New Year's resolution. Giving up something for Lent should be done prayerfully, so we can wholly renew ourselves in Christ. Giving up something for Lent is not a bad thing. It can be a good thing. There are certain things that are holding us back spiritually. In this sermon series, *Give Up*, I will challenge you to give up certain things that are slowing your spiritual growth.

Our Gospel reading for this evening comes the Gospel of Matthew. The early church fathers agreed the author of this Gospel was Matthew, one of the twelve disciples. Prior to following Jesus, he had been a tax collector. Matthew is called Levi in Luke and Mark. He penned these words between the years AD 50 and 60, to Greek speaking Jewish Christians. Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah sent by God to fulfill Old Testament law. Our reading is Matthew 16:21-28. Let me call this message *Give Up!*

Matthew 16:21-28 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. ²⁸ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

We begin our Lenten journey in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. 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 what the masses thought about him. Jesus wanted to know what the disciples thought about him. So, he asked them the question that changed everything, who do you say I am? The normally 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. Jesus warns them to be prepared for the same. True discipleship is not about glory. It is about sacrifice. Traditionally people 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. So, let me ask you this question: What are going to give up for Lent? Maybe you are giving up one of these things? The list changes from generation to generation. This list can be found in a variety of places. It is a list of what most people give up. 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!)

If you know of someone who gives up something for Lent, say, **"Amen!"**
have decided to follow Jesus, say, **"Amen!"**

What are you giving up for Lent? That is the question I am asked annually. The one who asks the question is my ex-neighbor. I moved seventeen years ago, but we still get together regularly. He is my escape from this church and my portal into the real world. He was raised Roman Catholic, but he hasn't practiced Catholicism in years. He married a Lutheran, but they are generally unchurched. However, they are good people. He has nothing positive to say about the Roman Catholic Church, but he looks at the world through a Roman Catholic screen. His heritage is exposed when he asks me the question, what are you giving up for Lent?

There is a website called *Catholic Extension*. I found an article on that site called *What to Give up for Lent*. This is their list of what to give up:

- Give up bitterness; turn to forgiveness.
- Give up hatred; return good for evil.

Give up negativism; be positive.
Give up complaining; be grateful.
Give up pessimism; be an optimist.
Give up harsh judgments; think kind thoughts.
Give up worry; trust Divine Providence.
Give up discouragement; be full of hope.
Give up anger; be more patient.
Give up pettiness; be more mature.
Give up gloom; enjoy the beauty around you.
Give up jealousy; pray for trust.
Give up gossiping; control your thoughts.
Give up sin; turn to virtue.

That list speaks to me. If that list speaks to you 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. My Lenten sermon series this year is called *Give Up!* Beginning this Sunday, March 1, the First Sunday of Lent, and ending on Easter, April 12, we are going to be talking about things you need to give up that are inhibiting your spiritual growth. This is my list of things we need to give up:

1. Control
2. Darkness
3. Arrogance
4. Enemies
5. Greed
6. Popularity
7. Death

Let me end not with a story but with a fact. Did you know, according to Life Way Research, 24% of all Americans observe the season of Lent? That means 76% of all Americans ignore Lent. That means, mathematically, we are in the minority. That does not bother me because Jesus as never interested in the crowd. Jesus was only interested in the committed. If you are committed to Jesus and ready to begin this great pilgrimage called Lent say, "**Amen!**"