



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Lent: Observance or Celebration?

When we talk about the Lenten Season, we often talk about celebrating Lent. However, Lent is not a season of celebration for the Church; it is a time of observance by the Church. In fact, Lent is one of the few religious times of the year that the secular world has allowed to pass by without trying to make it into a time of celebration, a store-wide sale or a holiday to get off work. Why? Because even the secular world realizes that Lent is not a time for revelry, celebration or merrymaking. Now, before you go there, keep in mind that both Carnival and Mardi Gras come before Lent even begins. It is true that these events are the secular world's attempt to get in their last chance for partying and revelry before the time of the religious observance begins. So, Lent is still not a time of celebration for the Church or the world. The reality is that it is quite the opposite, and, historically, folks do understand that it is a time for reflection and self-examination.

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "the real aim of Lent is, above all else, to prepare men for the celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ . . . the better the preparation, the more effective the celebration will be. One can effectively relive the mystery only with purified mind and heart. The purpose of Lent is to provide that purification by weaning men from sin and selfishness through self-denial and prayer, by creating in them the desire to do God's will and to make His kingdom come by making it come first of all in their hearts." Gender-specific language aside, the article is quite specific about the purpose of Lent being a time of observing and not celebrating the days of preparation for the real celebration that comes at Easter.

So how do we observe Lent? We observe it by setting aside forty weekdays to remind us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness after His baptism, prior to the start of His public ministry. Then we use those days to add into our usually very full schedules, extra time for personal prayer and bible study. Since our days are already crowded with what we must get done and what we need to do; many people will give up some task or activity of a pleasing or celebratory nature on those forty days so that they can have the extra time they need to observe Lent with their prayers and study. Thus, we have the practice of "giving up something for Lent."

Now, if you do not need to give up anything to make time for your additional prayers and study; then, by all means, just add in the prayer and study without disrupting your normal activities. The point of it all is to get the extra devotional time into your daily schedule. To help with that, we have the weekly simple supper and devotional services every Wednesday of Lent here at First Christian Church.

This year, our soup will be ready each week at 5:30 p.m. and our devotions will start promptly at 6:15 p.m. Beginning with the Service of the Imposition of Ashes, we will start our Lenten journey on February 13th. On February 20th, there will be a Service for the Sick where the elders will anoint with oil and pray for those who come forward. Prayers will also be offered up for our congregation as a

whole. Then, over the next four Wednesdays, we will hear from individuals as they come before us in character and present their side of the story of the events leading up to the arrest and crucifixion of the Christ. On Maundy Thursday, March 28th, everyone is invited to a covered dish dinner and Passover Seder Service in Bogan Hall. Finally, we will celebrate the resurrection at sunrise on Easter Sunday Morning, March 31st.

The Worship Committee has been working hard to make this year's observance of Lent something for everyone in the family. It is our hope that you will make the effort to be a part of these observances as we come together in preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Blessings to you all,

James