

***Ash Wednesday 2021***  
***An At-Home Beginning for the Season of Lent***

***Scriptural Introduction***

***Joel 2:12-18***

<sup>12</sup> Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup> rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. <sup>14</sup> Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

***2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2***

<sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**6** As we work together with him,<sup>[a]</sup> we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

***Matthew 6:1-6***

**6** "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>5</sup> "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**PASTOR ORR'S HOMILY: LENT THEN AND NOW**

So, we begin another season of Lent. Those of you who are as old as I am will remember Lent as a more severe season than it seems to be today. The fasting may have been required and was more challenging. Adults had to fast every day of Lent, and in some religious settings fasting included two meatless meals out of the three, with, of course, nothing between meals, and no meat at all on Fridays. Remember those fish sticks on Fridays at school?

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday demanded full abstinence from meat as well as fasting. So, abstinence from meat was an everyday Lenten thing, not just an Ash Wednesday/all-Lenten-Fridays practice. Foods like macaroni and cheese surely became a staple in those days!

We made personal sacrifices, giving up smoking, candy, alcohol, Dr. Pepper, Cokes. Today it may be our favorite quick-serve restaurant or something else that we really like. Generally, we practiced self-denial on Sunday, not just on weekdays. But now some call Sundays little Easters and have given cause to break their fast or whatever they chose to give up.

We went to Church a lot more. Many feel that Lent today is much easier. Encouragement is given to do positive things during Lent, so many don't give up much anymore. But that is a good thing; just think of it for that six-week period. What if we chose to do something good each day for someone else? As part of the lyrics to a song says, "What a wonderful world this could be."

Most people don't find their life during Lent much different from their life in any other season. Following the Second Vatican Council, [opened 11 October 1962 and was closed on 8 December 1965] (It really doesn't apply to us in the Protestant church as much, however we do take a number of our religious practices from the old church and other religions.), the church decided to take a risk and treat us as adults.

While many of the previous rules were removed, we were challenged to observe the season of Lent with all seriousness, to take responsibility for our own spiritual growth. ***That is a lot harder than just following rules, but it also bears the potential of really making Lent a time to change our lives and truly become more Christ-like.***

In our understanding, it is common to GIVE UP something for Lent. I would like to offer up some different ideas about what to GIVE UP versus the Sodas, Sweets, Fast Food, T.V., and the like:

GIVE UP grumbling! Instead, "In everything give thanks." Constructive criticism is OK, but "moaning, groaning, and complaining" are not Christian disciplines.

GIVE UP 10 to 15 minutes in bed! Instead, use that time in prayer, Bible study and personal devotion.

GIVE UP looking at other people's worst points. Instead concentrate on their best points. We all have faults. It is a lot easier to have people overlook our shortcomings when we overlook theirs first.

GIVE UP speaking unkindly. Instead, let your speech be generous and understanding. It costs so little to say something kind and uplifting. Why not check that sharp tongue at the door?

GIVE UP your hatred of anyone or anything! Instead, learn the discipline of love. "Love covers a multitude of sins."

GIVE UP your worries and anxieties! Instead, trust God with them. Anxiety is spending emotional energy on something we can do nothing about: like tomorrow! Live today and let God's grace be sufficient.

GIVE UP buying anything but essentials for yourself! Instead, give the money to God. The money you would spend on the luxuries could help someone meet basic needs. We are called to be stewards of God's riches, not consumers.

GIVE UP judging by appearances and by the standard of the world! Instead, learn to give up yourself to God. There is only one who has the right to judge: Jesus Christ.

May you find that this Lenten Season brings you to a new relationship with our God.