

Thoughts from Pastor

During the forty days of Lent, God's baptized people cleanse their hearts through the discipline of Lent: repentance, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Lent is a time in which God's people prepare with joy for the Paschal Feast (Easter). It is a time in which God renews His people's zeal in faith and life. It is a time in which we pray that we may be given the fullness of grace that belongs to the children of God. (Treasury of Daily Prayer - Ash Wednesday (CPH, page 26))

Concerning repentance the Lutheran Confessions teach:

This is God's thunderbolt. By the Law He strikes down both obvious sinners and false saints. He declares no one to be in the right, but drives them all together to terror and despair. This is the hammer. As Jeremiah says, "Is not My word like . . . a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (23:29). This is not active contrition or manufactured repentance. It is passive contrition, true sorrow of heart, suffering, and the sensation of death.

This is what true repentance means. Here a person needs to hear something like this, "You are all of no account, whether you are obvious sinners or saints (in your own opinions). You have to become different from what you are now. You have to act differently than you are acting, whether you are as great, wise, powerful, and holy as you can be. Here no one is godly."

But to this office of the Law, the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace through the Gospel. This must be believed. As Christ declares, "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15) That is, become different, act differently, and believe My promise. John the Baptist (preceding Christ) is called a preacher of repentance, but this is for the forgiveness of sins. That is, John was to accuse all and convict them of being sinners. This is so they can know what they are before God and acknowledge that they are lost. So they can be prepared for the Lord (Mark 1:3) to receive grace and to expect and accept from Him the forgiveness of sins. This is what Christ Himself says, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in (My) name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). (Smalcald Articles III III 2-6 (Reader's Edition, CPH)).

With this in mind, giving up a favorite food or an enjoyable activity for the season of Lent is an old custom, designed to remind us of everything that Jesus gave up for us in His suffering and death for our salvation. The Lutheran Reformers did not reject this custom, but they did warn against the idea that there is a direct spiritual benefit to be had from such a deprivation. They emphasized that we grow spiritually through faith in the Gospel, and not through the denial of bodily comforts.

In keeping with this emphasis, a uniquely Lutheran way of "giving something up for Lent" developed, namely the giving up of time, through going to church for an extra midweek service. Every Wednesday evening during Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 26, we will likewise have a chance to give up an hour of our time – time that we might otherwise use for recreation and relaxation, or a family activity – and dedicate that hour instead to the hearing of God's Word, and to the singing of hymns that will help us reflect on the meaning of Christ's suffering and death on our behalf.

In our giving up of time in this way, we not only remind ourselves of what Jesus gave up for us – which was a lot more than an hour of recreation and relaxation! – but we also use that time to expose ourselves to the Gospel of Christ. For only the Gospel, and faith in the Gospel, can draw us closer to Christ, and bring greater spiritual maturity to our lives. A physical deprivation, in and of itself, cannot do that.

God bless you always.

Pastor Landskroener

P.S. Thank you for the wonderful reception you have given to Kathy and me. The Installation Service and meal were fantastic. Your kindness and thoughtfulness are greatly appreciated. It is a joy to be with you and I look forward to getting to know you and serving you.

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