

“Lent, he said, is the season that the church has set aside for us to intentionally reflect on our relationship with God, others, and ourselves. It is a time to reflect on those things that bring us closer to God and others, and those things that keep us alienated from God and others.”

When I was a child growing up in the Shenandoah Valley, I recall that our Lutheran church focused on two aspects of the sacrificial nature of Lent. One was a mite box. My parents placed it on the kitchen table, and each day they would put coins in it. I don't recall that I put any coins in the box. I watched. The second thing was no meat on Friday. You need to understand that this was a big deal in our house - my parents raised all of our food including all the meat. We ate a lot of meat, especially beef. No meat at dinner was noticeable. My brothers complained. That was noticeable too.

Somewhere along the line, I developed a dislike for Lent. Who likes to do without something they love? “Where's the beef?” could have been my motto. In our early thirties my husband John and I were living in Columbia SC. I was the volunteer Christian Education Director at our small church, and I confessed to our Rector, Bob, that I didn't like Lent. He asked why, and I explained that I just couldn't make the connection between giving up something and the theology of Lent. “What's giving up chocolate got to do with my spiritual life?” I asked. The Senior Warden chimed in that he was giving up ax murders for Lent. “See,” I said to Bob, “that's my point. He's not even giving up something real for heaven's sakes. What's it got to do with making us better Christians?”

Bob rose to the occasion. Lent, he said, is the season that the church has set aside for us to intentionally reflect on our relationship with God, others, and ourselves. It is a time to reflect on those things that bring us closer to God and others, and those things that keep us alienated from God and others. Bob encouraged me to add something to my life in Lent, not take something away. So I began what has since become a yearly discipline. I've added such things as special daily readings, a Lenten retreat, daily worship, a spiritual discipline such as centering prayer and volunteering with the less fortunate.

Clever Bob. By adding these types of disciplines to my life, I began to take away, or give up, other things. Out of one of these Lenten habits I developed the practice of giving away at least two articles of clothing every time I buy a new one. It's a small thing that has made a big impact in my life. Another time, I developed the habit of the mite box! (Isn't it amazing what children learn by just watching?!) Now I give away additional monies in Lent.

Another time I gave away old grievances, and rebuilt some relationships. I'd never pledged to the church, so one year I said, "Shoot, I'll make a 6 week Lenten pledge to the church and we'll see how THAT works!" It worked. I can't not pledge anymore. Giving draws me closer to God because I have to do without some of the material things of this life that I love. And when I move them out of the way, God moves in.

We are here as God's stewards. You and I are called to learn generosity by giving. We are called to model it for children.

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