

A Reflection on Lent

(for context, you may wish to read Luke 4:1-13)

I don't know about you, but I've never really liked Lent. In most church traditions, it is a time for somber reflection – and “somber” isn't something I do very well. Hymns in minor keys and slow tempos. In some church traditions, no “Hallelujahs”, and ashes imposed on foreheads (“Dust thou art, and into dust thou shall return”, *Gen. 3:19 KJV*). Bad weather (most years). Lent hearkens back to the bad old days of the Old Testament: “Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God...” (*Joel 2:13a*). Folks “give up things” for Lent – as if we'll develop a deeper understanding of the human condition by not eating Hershey bars for six weeks. For a long time, I never quite got the point. Isn't Christianity all about being *free* of all such obligations and *not* feeling sorry for ourselves? *Ashes and sackcloth?* (*Esther 4:1, Job 42:6*)

But Lent “makes sense” in the context of the core message of Christianity. In fact, a period of reflection and repentance is probably (literally) *the least* we can do, in view of what's been done *for us*. We (all humankind) *lost our way*, big time and early on. But the God who made us loved us enough to give us all a second chance. He did it in the most profoundly loving way imaginable, by sending His own Son to live with us, to *be one of us*, and to suffer and die *in our stead*, “once and for all” to expunge our sins and reconcile us with God. One and done. Christ's sacrifice – what *He* gave up -- is *unimaginable* to us. I don't think that even six weeks without sweets will give us any sense of the depth and intensity of our salvation.

But maybe it's a start. I'd urge us all to take some time during the Lenten season this year to stop and think about what our lives would be like without the hope that lives in us *only because* of what Jesus has done for us. Even if we don't give up an afternoon Ghirardelli fix!

And, the best part, as always, is – we *know* that Lent ends with Easter!