

Sermon- Ash Wednesday- 2/14/2018- Our Savior's Lutheran Church

Well, here we are. Ash Wednesday, the beginning of our Lenten Season. All of us have some memories of Lent and what it meant years ago and what it means today. My memories of Lent go back to growing up on the streets of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, home to many of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball organization. Indeed, I only knew it was Lent by observing happenings around me. Our family attended a small congregation that was part of the Augustana Synod - a Swedish group, which was odd for a first generation Norwegian. Our church tended to view Lent as one of those Catholic things. So again, Lent became apparent by some observations.

First, I had to walk about 8 blocks to get to the subway which took me to my High School in downtown Brooklyn. Along this journey I would pass by about 12 Taverns - mostly Irish, ie: Catholic. Before Lent, these taverns would be packed as early as 7am. Some of these patrons, fathers of my friends would yell "go get em kid". I knew it was Lent when these some taverns were nearly empty. Thought to myself - must be Lent - everyone giving up booze.

Next, most of my friends would have a dirty smudge on their foreheads. Most of my friends were Irish Catholic. When I asked about it, my friends thought I was from outer space.

Growing up in Brooklyn during Lent was tough on a teenager. Dating especially. Catholic girls gave up dating during Lent. Norwegian girls were rarely allowed out at night. And Jewish girls only wanted to know if I was going to be a Doctor.

So today we begin. Lent here at Our Savior's in Neenah. We put ashes on our foreheads. A reminder that we have shortness of human life and that we all goof up. Dust to Dust theme. It's a 40 day period of reset and renewal. Some of us give things up during Lent. Probably a good idea to get rid of unhealthy stuff - especially if those things are taking over our lives.

Twitter users were recently asked about what things they were giving up for Lent. Some interesting responses: chocolate (movie - Chocolate), booze, Social Networking, some top choices. Another top choice was giving up Twitter - I would recommend that for our President. And of course the big one to give up was meat

on Friday. That is really idiotic here in Wisconsin. Everyone here loves fish fries on Friday. What kind of sacrifice is it to give up Meat on Friday?

So what should our response be to the disciplines of Lent. Give stuff up? Or take on something new? In our biblical text this morning, we have some specific disciplines of Lent.

When you give to the needy

When you pray

When you fast.

(Notice, Jesus does not say IF you give to the needy or IF you pray or IF you fast- he says WHEN.)

So we begin Lent - we might give up some things and hopefully take on some new things which will bring us closer to God. Here is a partial list for me.

Dennis

Give up grumbling and complaining - in everything give thanks.

Give up one meal a week. Lord knows you won't miss it, Dennis. Fast.  
New thing – give the cash to some charity.

Give up 10-15 minutes in bed. New thing - use the 15 minutes in prayer and reading the Bible before the craziness of the Day happens.

Give up looking at other people's worst points. New thing - focus on their best points. We all have faults. It will be easier for people to 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 up lifting. Check the sharp tongue at the door.

Give up worries and anxiety. Anxiety is spending emotional energy on something we can do nothing about... like tomorrow. Live for today and let God's grace be sufficient. Take on Trust

Give up TV at night. Instead, visit someone who is lonely or sick. Give someone a precious gift, your time!

You all have your own list. If you don't, make one. Let's take this walk together and get closer to God. Just giving up booze or chocolate will not get us closer to God - but a new attitude will.

Amen. Let it be so.