

What Are You Giving Up for Lent?

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ~ I PETER 2:1 (NIV)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. ~ PHILIPPIANS 4:8 (NIV)

How many of you have tried over the years to give up something for Lent? Although it was not a personal habit for me growing up, I had many friends who tried to give up sweets, coffee, alcohol, red meat, cursing, or (lately) even social media. The general idea, I think, is to be more self-controlled and to be willing to sacrifice something that we like to eat, drink, or do. It helps us to focus on the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

I would like to suggest this year that we seriously consider giving up different things ... not just for Lent, but for the rest of our lives. How about we decide to give up jealousy or an unforgiving spirit? How would we change our community if we could give up pessimism, apathy, anger, bitterness, lying, or judging others who are different from us?

What if we concentrated on those things and attitudes that are lovely, right, pure, and praiseworthy? Just think of the difference we can make if we choose to LOVE more! Jesus gave up His life for the forgiveness of our sins and rose again so that we may have eternal life with Him. He also told us that we are to be His messengers of love and light in the world. This Lenten season, let us all give up anything that would stand in the way of God's love and light shining through us to our family, our community, and the world.

Gracious God, may we take this time of Lent to give up all that is unpleasing in your sight so that we may shine your love and light to those around us.

JENNIFER ANDRADE

PITMAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Journey Can Feel Long

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

~ JEREMIAH 29:12 (NIV)

One of the things I experienced in my life is taking long trips. I remember as a child I would be so excited about hearing where we were going. My mom would start preparing for the trip weeks in advance. Because she had to pack for two girls, my dad, and herself, she began the packing process early. She would make a list of all the things we needed to take, and then she would ask us what types of snacks we would like to eat. She would come up with a plan for the food that she would prepare for the journey. The night before our departure, she wanted us to go to bed early so we would be ready for the journey. I would be so excited that I could hardly sleep. And no matter where we were going, the journey would be long.

As we take this journey during Lent, let us recognize that Jesus is taking His final journey toward the cross to die for our sins. May we spend time, therefore, not in mourning for what's to come, but excited like that little girl waiting for the trip ahead, knowing that because Christ died, we have access to eternity. Let it be a journey that allows us to find comfort in knowing how loved we are by God. Sometimes our faith journey can feel long and difficult, but we don't walk alone. Christ is always with us.

God, may you be with us on this journey called life. We give thanks for the sacrifice you made for us. We give you thanks this day and always for your love for us. Amen.

REV. DR. TIFFANY MURPHY
ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Let us ...

There are many ways to enter into the spirit of the season and to “observe” these days. It is not as important *what* we do but that we do *something* to make these days different from all the rest. Considering that, you will see verses throughout this book called “Let us” verses. **Let us** make a difference during Lent by observing some of these pearls from the Word of God. Here's the first one:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. ~ *Hebrews 10:25*

Walking a Labyrinth

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?

~ 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5 (ESV)

I had always wanted to participate in a spiritual exercise called “walking a labyrinth” but never had the opportunity to do so until God surprised me while visiting Cape Cod this past fall. While visiting a small local park, I discovered a labyrinth.

The labyrinth is an ancient pattern which has one continuous walking path that winds its way to the center and back out again. As I walked, I pictured my spiritual journey in three stages: the beginning of my relationship with the Lord, the centering of my life in the Lord, and the call on my life from the Lord.

As I entered the labyrinth, I began to quiet my mind and ask the Lord to help me hear what He was saying to me. My spiritual journey began when Jesus invited me to “Come follow Him” and I accepted the invitation. This path of the labyrinth was symbolic of this invitation. I was to begin by following the path before me with its twists and turns by faith, believing it would take me to my destination. The distance to walk was sometimes short and sometimes long before it changed direction. I experienced both sunshine and shade along the way. I contemplated how my life experiences have sometimes been very long before God has shown me it was time to change direction, and sometimes the change came after just a few steps. At times it has been a path that led me to walk in the sunshine able to see the light of His Presence, and sometimes it has been a journey through the valley dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty. Either way, the Lord watches over me.

The labyrinth path wound its way to the center where I found a resting place. Here I could linger. It was a time to reflect on what it means for me to abide in Christ, a time to praise Him and to confess sins, to identify fears, and to release burdens. Here I could picture myself being held in God’s loving embrace and receiving the peace of His Presence. As a gentle breeze blew across my face, I was reminded of the breath of God that fills me with His Spirit and leads me to my center, which is Christ. It is in Him that I live and move and have my being.

Leaving the center, I began the outward journey, remembering

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One God, One Way

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." ~ JOHN 14:6 (NIV)

During the last five years or more, I have heard a lot of troubling sayings. Some of them include, "All people pray to the same God." "There are many roads to heaven." "The Bible is a very old book."

This third saying gives me the most concern. It seems to imply that as a culture lowers its moral standards, we Christians should follow suit. However, we believers need to continue on the narrow road that leads to life. Believe Jesus' own words when He says in Matthew 5:19 (ESV): "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

So please believe Jesus.

Father God, I pray for another great awakening, that my brothers and sisters in Christ will believe your words and stay on the narrow road that leads to life. In Jesus' holy name, amen.

DON TOMALINO

CLONMELL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Walking a Labyrinth, continued from opposite page

Jesus' great commission to "Go into all the world and make disciples." This is the call of the Lord on my life. His Spirit will strengthen and empower me as I take God's message of love to a lost world.

Lord, during this season of Lent may we look inward, setting aside time for self-examination, spending time contemplating our relationship with you, confessing, and repenting of our sins. May we center ourselves in you, listening to your voice and embracing the refreshing rest of dwelling in your presence. May we find ways to show your love to others. May we remember your words: "Come follow me." "Abide in me." "Go and make disciples." Amen

LINDA TURK

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Note from Linda: I first learned of the spiritual exercise of walking the labyrinth while reading the *Sensible Shoes* series by Sharon Garlough Brown from our church library. This is a fictional account of four women from different backgrounds who meet at a Sacred Journey retreat. As their journey of a deeper faith unfolds, you see yourself in each of them, and your own transformation of faith begins to occur because you are given the opportunity to participate in the spiritual exercises that they are given. Readers will love this series!