

THE NEWSLETTER

A Ministry of Cornerstone Fellowship of Coatesville Pennsylvania

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EASTER EVENTS

Saturday, March 28 - EASTER EGG HUNT (Rain date - April 4)

Hunt begins at 10am

Children up to grade 5 are invited to come and hunt for Easter Eggs,

Sunday, March 29 - PALM SUNDAY

Services at 8:15 and 10:45am

Bible classes at 9:30am

Thursday, April 2 - Maundy Thursday

Tenebrae Service at 7pm

Sunday, April 5 - EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service - 6am

Worship services at 8:15 and 10:45am

Bible classes at 9:30am

LENT

On August 31, 1954, a hurricane swept across New England, felling thousands of trees, and leaving untold damage in its path. Of the trees that fell, some were uprooted because their roots were too shallow, some broke off because they were decayed at their center, and some were too inflexible, and were snapped off by the fury of the storm.

The storms and tensions of our time have revealed similar weaknesses in people's lives. Some people lack roots of faith to hold them steady when the storms of temptation and trouble come. Some are weakened by the presence of unconfessed sin in their lives. Some are inflexible in their pride and self-will, resisting the will of God for their lives.

Each year, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, the Christian church offers people a special opportunity to concentrate on the things of the spirit. This period is called **Lent**, from an old-English word meaning long, since the days lengthen in the spring. Lent is a period of forty days, not counting Sundays, that precedes Easter. It is an opportunity to enter into a deepening experience of

fellowship with God through meditation, prayer, devotional reading and helpful ministry to others. It is a time for remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a time for self-examination that we, too, may die to self in order to rise to newness of life with Christ. It is a time of self-denial and self-discipline that can lead to a deeper understanding of the meaning and power of the Christian life. If rightly used, it will become a source of joyful, peaceful and fruitful living.

In what ways can the observance of Lent help us to deepen our roots and strengthen our faith? For one thing, it reminds us that Jesus' death and resurrection are the pivotal point in His mission to earth. This is not to disparage His life and His teachings. Without His life, Jesus' death would have no meaning. But without His death, His life would have no power to save. If the Christian faith offered only the example of Jesus' perfect life, it would be a message of despair instead of hope, for who can be perfect as Jesus was perfect, or pure as He was pure? But Jesus, by His cross, reveals God's outreaching love for the sinner, and by His resurrection, He revealed God's power over death itself. The heart of the Christian message is not just the

injunction to try to live like Jesus lived, but that *God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Again, Lent helps us to recognize the part self-discipline and self-denial play in Christian growth. Jesus said, ***Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit.*** His own life and death were perfect examples of that truth. Only as He was willing to deny Himself, even to the extent of accepting the cross, could He be the world's Savior. And only as His followers deny themselves can they grow in their ability to understand and do God's will.

The tragedy is that self-discipline and self-denial seem to play such a small part in the lives of so many Christians. A taxi driver in a large city was hailed by a man who, rudely pushing others out of the way, demanded to be taken to an Easter sunrise service. The taxi driver quietly remarked, "You're supposed to carry a cross to go out there, and you don't seem to be carrying any cross." Not many Christians give the impression they are carrying a cross that costs them very much.

Most people think of Lent as a time to give up something. Usually, they give up something that does not call for much self-denial, such as eating candy or attending the theater. This has its place, but how much better it would be to think of Lent as an opportunity to add to our experience something that can contribute to Christian growth. It is a time when one can add to his awareness of God by giving renewed attention to prayer; when he can add to his knowledge of the Bible by reading, or re-reading, one of the Gospels; when, if he has neglected it, he can add to his church loyalty by regular attendance; when he can add to his Christian influence by going out of his way to do some deed of kindness to another. Thus Lent can become not just a period of the church calendar, but a milestone in a Christian's growth toward God.

Therefore, Let us make Lent...

A Time of Meditation and Prayer. A daily devotion of scripture reading and prayer is essential. Time is the important requirement – time deliberately taken out of our busy, rushing, modern lives. Personal spiritual growth is nurtured in quietness of soul.

A Time of Self-Denial. We should be led to a deeper appreciation of our stewardship. Self-denial is a privilege and an obligation. The setting aside, each day, of an offering which shall be used to extend Christ's kingdom here on earth, will result in a deepened conception of God's redeeming love for us.

A Time of Increased Faithfulness in Church Attendance. Regular and consistent attendance at public worship is necessary. Nothing should be permitted to interfere with our being present in God's House, where, in the shadow of the cross, we may meditate upon our Redeemer's love as revealed on the cross.

A Time of Ministry to Others. There are many ways of giving expression to the instinct of service. There are those who do not know the joys of Christian fellowship offered by membership in the Church of Christ. There are those who are ill or bereaved or lonely or perplexed with life as they have found it. *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

The Lenten Season is a challenge. The measure of the blessing we will gain from it will depend upon our response to its appeal.

MORE ABOUT LENT

The season of Lent is a time when we prepare our hearts, minds

and souls for the sacred observances of Christ's death on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter. In Lent, we recognize we are simply dust and ashes without Christ, we confess our sins to God, and we follow Christ to the cross, where we are made whole again. In the early Church, the six weeks of Lent were a time of training and instruction for converts to Christianity who were preparing to be baptized on Easter.

Lent lasts for 40 days, and begins on Ash Wednesday (this year - that was February 18th) and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). Sundays are excluded from the counting of the 40 days because they still remain "little Easters" even during this solemn season. The number 40 is significant because, at the start of his ministry, Jesus spent 40 days fasting, praying and resisting temptation, as we are called to do during Lent. (See Matthew 3:1-4:11)

Traditionally three disciplines are associated with Lent:

- Fasting - skipping a meal once a week or refraining from eating certain foods affords us the opportunity to spend more time feeding on the Word of God and being spiritually nourished through prayer and meditation.
- Abstinence - Removing a particular bad habit, sinful indulgence or guilty pleasure from our daily routine frees us to engage in activities that are God-pleasing and reflects in a small way the self-sacrifice that Christ endured for us.
- Almsgiving - Giving something extra during this time – to our church - is a way to remember that Christ gave up everything to save us from sin, death and the devil and to free us to live a new life in him.

There is ***ONE FOCUS*** during Lent – Our focus is solely on the cross of Christ. For it was on the cross that the sinless Son of God suffered and died for us that we might be fully forgiven and live forever with him in heaven. Reading Scripture verses about the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion, fasting, prayer, abstinence and almsgiving will help keep our focus strong.

The word "Passion" in the context of Lent does not refer to intense romantic love – though it does refer to intense love – the love of God in Christ that resulted in Christ's sufferings from the night of the Last Supper to his death on the cross on Good Friday. Scriptural accounts of these last days in Christ's life are called the Passion narratives. Make an effort to read some portion of one of the Passion narratives (found below) each day of Lent. Then spend 5-10 minutes simply pondering the words you have just read, thanking God for his great gift of love – the life of his only begotten Son.

PASSION NARRATIVES

Matthew 26:14-27:66

Mark 14:1-15:47

Luke 22:14-23:56

John 18:1-19:42

Lent is an opportunity to enter into a deepening experience of fellowship with God through meditation, prayer, devotional reading and helpful ministry to others. If rightly used, it will become a source of joyful, peaceful and fruitful living.

The chief aim of LENT is to keep the soul in spiritual health by implanting in every heart periodically such a conviction of our essential weakness and sin that we are enabled to walk humbly once again with God. Jesus and John the Baptist alike came preaching "Repent ye for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." All real and committed faith experiences must begin, continue and end in a spirit of penitence, a recognition as we take an honest

look AT OUR OWN LIVES (not someone else's) of our continuous need of God and our continuous need to repent of our evil-doing. It is only when we are weak, in admitting our dependence on Him, that we may grow spiritually.

Even Jesus, following his baptism, felt the need to withdraw to the wilderness where, free from the distractions of the world, he might seek to become submissive and obedient to the will of His Father.

This is an attitude that we modern Christians should emulate - to seek to become submissive and obedient to the will of our Heavenly Father.

READ YOUR BIBLE

Continuing to provide suggested passages to help you toward achieving the discipline of studying God's Word, please use the following as your guide for the month of March. We will never understand how to walk the Jesus way unless we immerse ourselves in the guidebook He has provided -- the Bible.

March

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|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Matthew 5:13-20 | 17. Matthew 9:35-10:15 |
| 2. Esther 4:4-17 | 18. Luke 5:1-11 |
| 3. Matthew 16:13-28 | 19. Mark 4:1-20 |
| 4. Luke 14:25-35 | 20. Acts 8:26-40 |
| 5. Mark 10:17-31 | 21. John 9:13-25 |
| 6. Acts 20:17-35 | 22. Acts 7:54-8:8 |
| 7. Romans 12:1-8 | 23. Mark 11:1-11 |
| 8. 2 Timothy 2:1-13 | 24. Mark 14:1-9 |
| 9. Job 23:1-12 | 25. Matthew 26:14-25 |
| 10. Psalm 37:1-11 | 26. Matthew 26:36-46 |
| 11. Psalm 37:18-31 | 27. Matthew 27:11-31 |
| 12. Psalm 63:1-11 | 28. Mark 15:21-41 |
| 13. Psalm 119:41-72 | 29. Hebrews 9:11-28 |
| 14. John 16:16-24 | 30. Matthew 28:1-10 |
| 15. Hebrews 13:1-9 | 31. John 20:1-18 |
| 16. John 1:43-51 | |

DYING & RISING

Based on John 12:20-33

This Gospel lesson marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Up until this time Jesus has carried on a public ministry, teaching, healing, even raising his friend Lazarus from death to life. Now Jesus declares that "the hour has come" to reorient himself toward the act of his own death. From this point onward, Jesus will pursue a more private ministry with his disciples, preparing them for the climax which looms ahead.

Jesus speaks with courage and conviction regarding his death. He presents it as a necessary event, as indispensable as the death of a seed which sacrifices its old form so that new life can spring forth. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Many of us have learned the truth of Jesus' saying. We know that there are times when we must let the old ways die in order to allow the new to grow. We have learned that destructive habits must die before new, life-giving patterns can take their place. We know that there is a time to let go of bitterness, a time to retire unrealistic hopes, so that a healthier vision can bear fruit in us. These little deaths can lead to powerful resurrections and growth.

The disciples no doubt recognized this general truth, but still they resisted Christ's predictions about himself. Who could have imagined that the death of one man could produce such

astounding new life as Christ's death was about to do? Who could have predicted that through Christ God would bring an end to the power of sin and lay open a new future for all humanity?

Christ's death was like no other. It was not just a transition but a revolution. Through Christ's death and resurrection human history has been reshaped. We have been reunited with the Creator who once seemed lost behind the curtain of our sin and rebellion. In Christ we have died to sin and have been raised up to new life with God.

The rhythm of dying and rising is therefore a mark of Christian life. According to Martin Luther, the meaning of baptism reflects precisely this rhythm: "(Baptism) means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever." (Luther's Small Catechism)

Lent is a time of little deaths, when we shuck off those things which do not bring life or encourage faith. We pare down our lives to the essentials and ask our God to recreate us. In these final weeks of Lent, as we anticipate the dying and rising of our Lord, let us allow the rhythm of repentance and renewal to mark our lives. Let us die to our old destructive ways, and let us ask God to lead us into new ways of worshiping and serving. With the psalmist, let us open ourselves to God's gift of renewed life: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again, and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit."

AMERICA FOR CHRIST

We are called by God to be more Christlike. We must engage in discipleship by rejecting self-centeredness for a Christ-centered lifestyle-->> to have open eyes is to see the suffering, injustice and need around us. We cannot walk by and hope someone else will respond...>> to have an open heart is to feel and identify with the suffering of others - to care and give our best in the name of Jesus...>> to have open hands is to be ready and willing to come alongside a person in need and become involved in his or her life. During the month of March each year, we have the opportunity to help make a difference in our communities and our nation through the **America For Christ** Offering. Our contributions to AFC go to support Christ-centered ministries that help transform lives through: evangelism and church planting; camps and leadership development conferences; community development and refugee resettlement; and volunteers in mission to name a few. If you would like to make a gift to the America For Christ offering, please use a special envelope that you can find on the table in front of the sound desk in the Worship Center.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Here is the Gospel message as plain as you can get!

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved

Acts 16:31

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

Jesus said, 'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.'

John 3:17

Jesus said, 'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'

Luke 19:10

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and

burdened, and I will give you rest.'

Matthew 11:28

Jesus said, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.'

John 6:37

Jesus said, 'I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.'

John 10:9

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:13

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

A TRUE STORY

After a few of the usual Sunday evening hymns, the church's pastor slowly stood up, walked over to the pulpit and, before he gave his sermon for the evening, briefly introduced a guest minister who was in the service that evening. In the introduction, the pastor told the congregation that the guest minister was one of his dearest childhood friends and that he wanted him to have a few moments to greet the church and share whatever he felt would be appropriate for the service. With that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak.

"A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific coast," he began, "when a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to the shore. The waves were so high, that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright and the three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized." The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. The aged minister continued with his story, "Grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: to which boy he would throw the other end of the life line. He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian, and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of waves. "As the father yelled out, 'I love you, son!' he threw out the life line to his son's friend. By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered."

By this time, the two teenagers were sitting up straight in the pew, anxiously waiting for the next words to come out of the old minister's mouth. "The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend. How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us. Our Heavenly Father sacrificed His only begotten Son that we could be saved. I urge you to accept His offer to rescue you and take hold of the life line He is throwing out to you in this service." With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room.

The pastor again walked slowly to the pulpit and delivered a brief sermon with an invitation at the end. However, no one responded to the appeal. Within minutes after the service ended, the two teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," politely stated one of the boys, "but I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give up his only son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian."

"Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing

down at his worn Bible. A big smile broadened his narrow face, he once again looked up at the boys and said, "It sure isn't very realistic, is it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His Son for me.

You see – I was that father and your pastor is my son's friend."

(We never know the impact of our words and deeds on someone else's life, both now and for eternity – so be careful to remember to "let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" Ephesians 4:29-32.)

CHANCE ENCOUNTER?

Believing in "luck" or "chance" is not scriptural. We do not live in a random universe. Our sovereign God rules the universe and every electron and molecule in it. Our encounters with others are not by chance, but on purpose, especially when we pray for God to use us. The story is told of a trip that Bill Bright (founder of Campus Crusade for Christ) took one day. On this occasion, a woman was sitting next to him on the airplane whom God ministered to in a special way during their conversation.

He asked her if she was willing to read through *The Four Spiritual Laws* with him. She answered that she was already a believer. Bill Bright had prayed every morning that God would lead him to the right people to talk to about Him, and so he knew that God had something to say to her.

So he took out the small booklet entitled *Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-filled Life?* which he had written and gave it to her to read while he prayed for her. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the woman read the booklet several times. And then he noticed tears streaming down her cheeks.

She turned to him and said, "Thank you so very much for giving me this booklet. There is no way that you could know how appropriate it was. I am a Christian, but I am having an affair with a man, even though I am married. And the man with whom I am having the affair is waiting for me at the airport so I can move in with him. Now I know where I will turn to get the strength to withstand the temptation. I will turn down my friend and return to my husband."

Bill Bright tells about what joy filled his heart that God could use him to bring blessing to someone else. After reading the little booklet, the woman recognized that there is a difference between a carnal, worldly Christian and a spiritual Christian (1 Corinthians 1:1-3), and how one can be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment and live in the power and victory of the Holy Spirit.

(If you'd like to read this little booklet, you can find it on line at www.greatcom.org/spirit/languages.html.)

BITTERNESS KILLS

There is a certain cold logic to bitterness. Bitterness appeals most strongly to our sense of right and wrong, to our sense of fairness. Bitterness says that we have a permanent right to hate those who have hurt us or allowed us to be hurt by others. Bitterness is more interested in past losses than present and

future gains. It forfeits hope and doesn't care. When we are caught up in the self-indulgent throes of bitterness we would rather lash out at a loving God and those who represent Him who would "restore the years the locust has eaten" than allow Him to restore those years to us.

Unrepentant bitterness is the biggest barrier to our healing and happiness. To be bitter is, by definition, to remain unhealed. Just as we cannot be healed of physical infection unless we are willing to let the doctor touch and cleanse the wound, so our souls cannot heal unless we surrender what ails us to God. Bitterness is a sort of spiritual infection. If we are not truly willing to let God put His hands on this angry, hateful contamination of our soul, He cannot and will not heal us.

In fact, the wound analogy can be taken a step further. Imagine having a cut and purposely putting dirt and filth in it. The result of such an action is to make the infection worse and potentially cause it to spread throughout the body. Every time we choose to entertain bitterness we are making the infection stronger within us. This is the patent insanity of holding on to angry unforgiveness. Nursing a grudge is, in effect, sickening ourselves.

Actually this spiritual illness will eventually spread even if we do not actively make it worse by dwelling on it. Ignoring an infected injury ultimately has the same effect as feeding it. Acting as if it isn't there just draws out the period of time in which it does potentially irreparable damage to our lives. Bitterness simply cannot be allowed to be present at all if it is not to destroy us. It must go!

But it cannot go if we are not finally willing to let it go. The problem is we get a certain perverse satisfaction in clinging to our hurts. Perhaps it is the stubborn tendency to want to judge others. We do not want to release them to the one true Judge so we hold onto what they have done to us and blame them for it in perpetuity. We would rather hate them than give in to a forgiveness that takes their punishment out of our hands.

We get some terrible false gratification from letting a grudge define us. This is a particularly evil form of insanity.

The self-inflicted curse of bitterness spits in the face of both the healing and the Healer. It perpetuates wrong relationship with God, others, and ourselves. It is idolatry because the "right" to be bitter is elevated above our absolute imperative to be obedient to God and forgive as He forgives. It is deeply wicked and incredibly destructive to our very souls. Bitterness kills because when we do not forgive, we are not forgiven, and who among us doesn't need to be forgiven. **So let go of your bitterness.**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The former Attorney General of the United States, John Ashcroft, has said, "Islam is a religion in which Allah requires you to send your son to die for him. **Christianity is a faith in which God sent His Son to die for you.**"

LENT

DO YOU KNOW PEOPLE who still practice "giving up" something for Lent? What appears to be an outmoded custom no doubt had merit in a previous generation. They attempted to make Lent a special time of devotion and discipline.

The words of Jesus in the Gospel, Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-18, speak directly about the way we express our religious devotion. The word is piety. He said, "Beware of practicing your piety

before other people."

Please note that he continues by saying, "WHEN you...," not "if you decide to..." He emphasizes and underscores the positive nature of some basic devotional acts.

"WHEN YOU GIVE ALMS..." Alms meant sharing with the poor and those in need. It appears to be expected by Jesus of his disciples. From the announcement of his public ministry (Luke 4:16-19) to the concerns expressed in his parables (Good Samaritan, rich man and Lazarus, the last judgment) Jesus personally identified with those who were the recipients of alms. They were the victims of crimes, the poor, and the social misfits. He expected his followers to likewise identify with them. In this passage he was concerned that the disciples' motivation for giving be true and not perverted. The need of the giver to give alms was being emphasized. It was – and is – a natural act of discipleship.

"WHEN YOU PRAY..." Once again it appears clear that Jesus expected his disciples to pray. It was the normal expression of a learning relationship. In the Gospel according to Luke the Lord's Prayer was the result of the disciples' request, "Lord teach us to pray." It is possible to conclude that praying is an attribute of discipleship. A Christian prays. This is different than saying a Christian ought to pray, or some Christians pray.

In this passage the emphasis is directed toward vain repetition. The comparison is with the hypocrites... the "play actors." Once again the motive is central. Does this not relate to our interpretation of the commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain?" How often have we narrowly believed that this commandment referred to the common practice of swearing, or condemning. Is it not possible to believe that we break this commandment when we pray using vain repetitions, for others to see us, and learn prayers (including our Lord's prayer) by rote, refusing to believe that any translation other than the one we learned years ago as children is the correct one? Have you ever heard persons say that they just cannot pray unless they use *their* familiar words? Jesus said, "When you pray... pray to your Father."

"WHEN YOU FAST..." As a religious discipline, fasting is not frequently practiced today. Common in the days of Jesus, and carried on by the Roman Catholic church in some form until quite recently, we need to rethink and recapture its meaning. Great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi fasted as a means of drawing attention to a particular program or cause. Many Americans are willing to fast one day as a sign of identification with the world's hungry, and also as a means of discipline to share with others. Some will fast for selfish reasons, believing it has physical advantages.

Once again, Jesus was concerned about the purpose and the motivation. Discipline, not "brownie points" is the object.

The forty days of LENT is a very appropriate time for disciplined piety. The practice of "giving up" something for Lent is not all that bad. It really depends on WHY we give something up, and what we use to replace the time involved, or how we use the money saved. Even narrowly relating to the text at hand, we can find helpful insights about Lenten piety.

Most churches have special observances during Lent. But it is harder and harder to get people to attend worship more frequently than once a week. Lent is a great time to "practice" prayer. Lenten worship should naturally focus on expressing the

relationship which one has with God – both in gratitude for Christ's salvation, and in concern to identify with Jesus in his struggle in preparation for the cross. Prayer is that relational expression. Personal determination to strengthen one's piety during Lent can begin with daily devotions, with a conscious effort to focus on a deepened and more meaningful prayer life.

In the Old Testament in the book of Joel it is most interesting that Joel says, "Yet *even* now... return to me with *all* your heart." This included fasting, weeping, and mourning as signs (acts) of repentance.

And Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, speaks of reconciliation, righteousness, and "working together with him." Now is the time to respond.

So often our problem is one of determined and disciplined actions. It is like the story of the lady who received a new iron for Christmas, and took it back to the hardware store after several weeks. The manager told her there was nothing wrong with the iron, and she should have her house wiring checked. "Oh," she replied, "I don't have electricity in my house, but my neighbor does. I go to her house and we drink coffee while I plug the iron in, and then run quickly home. But I can't get much ironing done."

Perhaps Lent can be the beginning of a regular, determined life of devotion.

Giving alms as noted in the Biblical text has developed into organized programs for stewardship for some congregations and individuals. But the Biblical injunction remains to make stewardship a lifestyle rather than a sharing of money left over from the other expenditures of daily living. Lenten piety includes the giving of alms as we consciously and consistently share money with those in need, and help develop programs which will enlarge our individual ability to alleviate pain and suffering. Good stewardship of money is a most appropriate expression of Lenten piety.

Jesus concludes this particular section by talking about "reward" and the contrast between the human or earthly reward, and the reward of our Father who is in heaven. Reward in this regard is not to be thought of as something deserved, or in the slightest way earned. Just the opposite is true. Reward is the response which God gives to the faithful and committed disciple. In the parable of the Last Judgment, the "reward" to the faithful who shared of themselves and their money was to "inherit the kingdom prepared for them." The great insight of this parable was that these very people were surprised and responded as such. "When did we see you hungry, naked, in prison, and in need," they said. One does what is right, and God takes care of the response. The joy of discipleship is that we do not have to worry about reward and compensation. Doing the right things for the right reason is enough.

Jesus warned all of us about practicing our piety in the wrong places, for the wrong reasons. He spoke clearly that we should give alms, pray and fast. Lent is a most appropriate season for rethinking our piety, and practicing it with meaning.

Three centuries ago St. Francis de Sales, one of the wisest spiritual counselors of his day, wrote: "I shall keep this Lent and hope to refresh my soul. It is like a clock all out of order. I must take it to pieces and after cleansing it, I must somehow put it together again, that it may strike correctly and once more give the right time."

These words surely speak to our own condition. How often our lives feel all out of order, ticking along day by day but somehow never seeming to strike the right time. Then come these days of Lent and with them the yearning, sometimes secret, sometimes openly expressed, to refresh our run-down souls. Originally in the Anglo-Saxon the word, Lent, meant simply "spring." For us Christians it can, and should mean, much more – the season of the springtime of the spirit.

We find this renewal and springtime, for one thing, by reviving the most sacred memories of our Christian heritage. We reread and relive the life of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. But we must also walk alongside our Lord down the dusty roads of Palestine, watch Him heal and help, hear Him speak timeless words of truth, join His disciples in the triumph of Palm Sunday, the indignation of the cleansing of the Temple, the mystery of the Last Supper, and as we climb with Him the steep ascent of the Cross. The spiritual asks plaintively, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" In his heart of hearts the Christian always answers yes in these days of Lent.

Lent, however, is more than a season of sacred memory; it is a time of inner searching and high resolve. No one can tell another Christian all that this involves but may we suggest some disciplines the church has always found useful:

We shall have to save some time each day for the reading of Scripture and the practice of prayer. "Blessed is he who has time to spare for God."

We shall attend regularly the services of our church, not out of some timeworn sense of duty but gladly and in humble gratitude for "the intolerable compliment" of God's love, revealed in the life and death of His Son.

We shall "turn the searchlight within," examining our lives in the light of God's purpose and will, seeking His forgiveness for our sins, finding His power. The miracle of Lent is always repentance leading to newness of life. We must believe this miracle can work in us. If it does not, Lent will be just another religious routine. But if it does, we shall come to Easter with a real and lasting song in our hearts.

YOUTH NEWS

DON'T FORGET!!

YOUTH FELLOWSHIP (grades 6-12) - WEDNESDAYS, 7-8:30 pm weekly (following the Mid-Week Worship Celebration)! Come and experience it! Bring your friends!!

YOUTH SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP - THURSDAYS at 7pm (EVERY YOUTH is invited!)

YOUTH BIBLE FELLOWSHIP - for Jr & Sr High - 9:30 am Sunday mornings

Worship Celebrations - Sundays at 8:15 and 10:45 am and Wednesdays at 6:30pm

PLEASE HELP US OUT!

EMPTY INKJET PRINTER CARTRIDGES

Please donate your empty inkjet printer cartridges to the youth group to be recycled. A container is placed in the **coat room** to receive your donations. **KEEP THOSE CARTRIDGES COMING!** We appreciate every bit of help we receive.

CHILDREN'S NEWS

COOL KIDS - Children, 4 years old up through grade 3 are invited to participate in COOL Kids on Sunday mornings at both the 8:15 and 10:45 celebration services. Following the praise time and the reading of scripture in the Worship Center, kids are dismissed to ROOM 108. COOL Kids (**C**hildren **O**f **O**ur **L**ord Kids) helps kids learn to celebrate Christ in a way they enjoy and become excited about.