

A few words about Lent from Kim:

Some of you may remember that I grew up in the Southern Baptist tradition. We didn't observe Lent and I viewed it as another "Catholic" practice that was foreign to me. It fell somewhere between not understanding holy water or why I wasn't allowed to take communion. It never occurred to me that Lent may be something that I might actually be interested in, or benefit from, or come to value as a way of deepening my faith in God.

In the ancient church, Lent was a time for new converts to be instructed for baptism and for believers to focus on repentance. Over time, most Christian faith traditions came to see Lent as a season to be reminded of their need for penitence and to prepare spiritually for the celebration of Easter. Part of this preparation involved the Lenten fast—giving up something special during the six weeks of Lent. Many Protestants rejected the practice of Lent, pointing out, truthfully, that nowhere was it required in Scripture, and that it may obscure the gospel of grace.

Some Protestant faith traditions continued to recognize Lent as a season of preparation for Easter. Their emphasis was not so much on penitence and fasting, but on an intentional devotion to God. Churches added a Bible study or prayer service so that their congregations would be ready for a deeper experience of Good Friday and Easter. Lent was a time to do something extra for God, not give something up.

However, most Protestant denominations have paid more attention to Lent during the last two decades. Some people give up something like watching TV, or some food group like sweets or meat. Some people add extra devotional reading or choose to serve their community in some capacity. My friend that chose to give up TV thought his television fast was especially tough because he had to give up March Madness! At the end of his fast he decided that although he didn't have any mystical experiences, he found that the television fast helped him focus on God, look ahead to Good Friday, and Easter, and appreciate more deeply the meaning of the cross and the victory of the resurrection. Personally, when I didn't honor Lent, Good Friday and Easter always seemed to rush by before I could give them the attention they deserved. Now that I observe and honor Lent, I am ready to meditate upon the depth of Christ's sacrifice, my worship is enriched, my faith in God is deepened, and I am ready to celebrate his resurrection on Easter. That said, if a spiritual discipline helps you grow closer to God, then do it. But if it doesn't, don't feel obligated. If observing Lent helps you prepare for a deeper celebration of Good Friday and Easter, if it allows you to grow in God's grace, then by all means, keep it! If Lent isn't your cup of tea, then don't feel obligated to keep it.

This Lenten season Bayside is offering an Adult study, *Half Truths* by Adam Hamilton. The study will meet on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings. Prayer stations based on the Psalms will be available in the Sanctuary. Chi Yi is preparing special music for Lent, and the order of service in worship will reflect the Lenten season.

It is my prayer for you that Lent will be especially meaningful to you this year no matter which practice you choose!