

## Embracing Lent with a Smile

I grew up in heavily Lutheran territory. Consequently, whenever the season of Lent came around, there was talk about what to give up for Lent. Not in my church, which did not observe Lent, but among many of my schoolmates and no doubt in their churches. I decided to give up watermelon.

Nowadays, the best thing about Lent, from my perspective, is that fast food places have specials on fish sandwiches, which I like.

If you're getting the impression that I don't take Lent very seriously, you're right. There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that I think the last thing Christians should do is give the impression that they are engaged in a season of self-denial.

No doubt there are Christians who are sincerely engaged in meaningful self-denial during this season, and perhaps they would deserve admiration if we knew who they were, but if they are any good at being Christians, we'll never know. For as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Whenever you fast, do not look dismal [or] disfigure [your] faces so as to show others that [you] are fasting." Rather, Jesus instructs that those who fast should spruce and clean themselves up to look their best, so that their fasting may not be seen by others. Sackcloth and ashes have no place in Christian fasting.

The other reason I have a hard time taking Lent seriously is that really giving up something meaningful for Lent doesn't seem to happen very much. Most of us overeat, and should reduce our intake, but our biggest over-consumption does not happen at the dinner table. You want to get serious about Lent? Give up that pricey cruise. Give up that fossil-fuel consuming travel tour. Give up that luxurious home with three extra bedrooms, a wet bar, a spa, a huge lawn to water and mow. Give up the sports car, the travel trailer, the yacht, the exclusive club membership, the weekly appointments with the hair stylist, the designer dresses. And don't just give them up for a few weeks, do it permanently. While you're at it, give up all your grudges.

It would be a serious blow to the economy, at least in the short term, but it might just save us from global warming in the long run, if folks got really serious about Lent. And did so with a smile! Any takers?

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