



GIVING UP TAKING UP

MODERATOR'S 2024 SEASON OF LENT MESSAGE

TENA KOUTOU KATOA

Easter is early this year – almost as early as it can be. And that means Lent has crept up on us as well. A friend sent me a text, part of which read, “R u giving up anything, or taking up something, 4 Lent?” A good question.

This season of Lent emerged out of the practice of preparing new converts for Baptism on Easter Eve or Easter Day. By the middle of the fourth-century, a 40-day preparation period had been established. Later, Lent became a time for all Christians to prepare for Easter. It remains a 40-day long period, not counting Sundays; Sundays are considered ‘little Easters’, celebrating the Resurrection.

While Lent is no longer seen as a time to enter into a period of excessive gloom and self-denial, it remains a season that invites people into a more reflective mood.

We hear of people ‘giving something up for Lent’. Some give up particular foods for the season. Others give up things like television, Facebook, obsessive use of mobile phones and so on. All of this is designed to help reflect on what is important in life, to focus on the needs of the spirit, to think of one’s faith commitment, to identify with the majority of the world’s population who have so little.

Others prefer to ‘take up’ something new instead, something that will make a difference. Taking time each day to read and reflect on Scripture, to reconcile themselves to someone they have fallen out with or don’t like, to volunteer for a worthy project, to be in contact with people they have neglected, to pick up rubbish in the neighbourhood, and so on. Again, this is about being intentional in looking at one’s life and contributing something positive to the community.

‘Giving up’ something can carry with it the sense of it being a grind, doing it through clenched teeth! However, often when we give up something we gain something valuable.

I recall a recovering alcoholic telling me of the experience of giving up drinking. For years his family had told him he had a problem, but he didn’t see it. One night a television programme on alcoholism spoke powerfully to him and he started his journey of sobriety. He reflected on how much he had ‘gained’ through this. A whole new world opened up - the world looked, smelt and tasted different. He observed colours he hadn’t seen for a long time. Relationships with his family and friends improved. Giving up can lead to freedom.

The season of Lent can be used as an opportunity to slow down, take stock, and reflect upon the direction of our own lives. We contemplate Jesus’ journey to the cross and what that means for us.

I found a little list of popular Lent Bible verses:

Isaiah 58: 6-7	Take on something
Mark 1: 12-13	Find your wilderness
John 3: 16	Remember his sacrifice
1 Peter 5: 6	Reveal your struggle
Matthew 6: 16-18	Keep a secret

Giving up. Taking up. Reflecting on Jesus’s journey to the cross. Let this Lenten season be a time of growing deeper into our faith and seeing the fruits of this play out in our lives and the communities in which we live.

Kia tau te Rangimarie
Rose

Right Rev Rose Luxford
Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
moderator@presbyterian.org.nz