



February, 2018

### Pastor Tim's Message

As we approach another season of Lent, we always begin with Ash Wednesday. It is a time to reflect on our mortality, repentance, and the depth of Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. It is a deeply meaningful service to begin our journey to the empty tomb and beyond.

What makes this time a little different for me is that Valentine's Day and my 14th wedding anniversary are on Ash Wednesday this year. I tried to convince Audra that a pancake supper before an Ash Wednesday service was a great anniversary date, but we are going out on another day. However, it made me think, is there a way that the season of Lenten sacrifice and penitence is related to Valentines Day chocolates and flowers?

According to the legends, Saint Valentine was a priest who lived during the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius Gothicus. The official imperial policy of the day was that it was illegal for Christians to be married or receive aid of any kind, but Valentine chose to defy the laws of the land and marry couples anyway. For this he was arrested and martyred on February 14th.

Valentine chose to love and serve others despite the imperial voices dictating that he withhold aid. As a priest, he could easily have devoted himself in such a time of persecution to personal devotions that would have drawn him closer to God (and saved his own neck), but instead he opted to help those in need and include those the powers-that-be demanded be excluded. He became a martyr for the sake of love.

Maybe during this season of Lent, we choose not to see Valentine's Day as an awkward dilemma to deal with but as a guide for our practices. What if we too choose to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of love? What if our fasting is not to gain something from God, but to give something away of God? So, instead of giving up chocolate or Facebook for Lent, we could work to aid those who are hurting, struggling, or feel excluded in some way. It could be volunteering at the meal site or with Family Promise at the end of February. It could be as simple as calling or visiting someone who is lonely. This might include an elderly shut in, stay at home parent, someone who has recently lost their job or someone who is grieving a loss. It could even be turning off the TV, computer, phone and resting in the stillness to be in prayer and conversation with God.

I invite us to see that the way of Christ is about sacrificing beyond just ourselves to help create the sort of world where the lowly are uplifted and the outcast welcomed. Having Valentine's Day at the very start of Lent this year can be about more than just us feeling guilty about indulging during Lent, it can remind us that sacrificing ourselves for the sake of love is the greatest sacrifice of all.

In God's Love

Pastor Tim

We love  
because He first loved us!  
1 John 4:19



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