



“Return”

Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2018

All Services

The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I need to make a confession. And I do so with as much love as I possibly can: Growing up, I had, I believe, the meanest mother in the entire world.

I say this, not because we had to go to school; not because my sister and I were **not** allowed to run amok; nor do I say that because we had to keep our rooms relatively in order, or go to church EVERY SUNDAY (we went to early worship, and sat in the second pew from the front on the left-hand side).

No, I confess this awful truth to you all because, whenever my sister and I would fight, and in the process, say some mean or horrible or hurtful thing to one another, Mom would take us, and say to us in her *best* “Mother” voice:

If you can † say something nice about each other, then don † say anything at all.

(Some of you have met my mother, and know she is a diminutive woman. But when you’re five, your mother is an Amazon).

And the reason this is so traumatic to me is that, even today, however many decades later, when asked about someone with whom I might struggle, I feel this invisible hand over my mouth, and a voice that only I can hear that says: **Don’t. Say. Anything.**

We tend to think of Lent as a time of “don’ts”, right? Because in Lent, many of us give up something. We *don †* eat chocolate, or we *don †* drink soda, or we *don †* watch our favorite show (we do *record* it to watch later, though, because we are not **total** barbarians). We *don †* have our special treat, or do our favorite activity, or whatever it might be that we “give up” that we “don’t do” during Lent.

I mean, look at our gospel reading: **Don’t** let others know you are fasting; **Don’t** store up your treasures; **Don’t** stand on the street corner and pray; **Don’t** give alms in public. But is that really the intent of Jesus’ admonitions?

Lent is a time of preparation, yes. Lent is five weeks of remembering that, no matter how much we may *want* to do good, we are always, on our own, going to mess it up. We are sinful, imperfect human beings.

So, we take these weeks to recall, to remember, to return, to the way our baptism calls us to live. We take these weeks to remind ourselves that while we are *indeed* saved by grace through faith, and therefore there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation, to win God's love, or to force God to care for us, God through Christ Jesus loves us anyway, loves us regardless, loves us *in spite of* ourselves. Christ calls to us to turn from our human, sinning ways, to turn from our ways that work *against* God, to turn from the ways that take us from being ambassadors for Christ, and *return* to God.

Instead of the "don'ts", let's "do": *Don't* watch the tv show; **Do** read scripture. *Don't* eat that treat; **Do** give the money you saved a ministry in need. *Don't* stop yourself from indulging in that favorite activity; **Do** go help out at Bethesda Mission, or New Hope Ministry, or the Ecumenical Food pantry.

Leave the negative ways of this world. Return to the love and grace and forgiveness and hope offered by Christ on the cross. And if you can't say something nice about someone, what's wrong with you?

Return to God's grace.

Amen.

Copyright © 2018, John H. Brock. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org