



The Allegan Congregationalist

April 2023

Our church exists to introduce people to Jesus Christ and train those who already know Him.

Preparation for Easter

by Greg Carlson



Holy Week Events:

- 4/2 Palm Sunday
- 4/6 Maundy Thursday Service 7 PM
- 4/7 Procession of the Cross 11:45 AM @ Mahan Gazebo
- 4/7 Good Friday Service 7 PM @ the Baptist Church
- 4/9 Sunrise Service at 7 AM Hudson Corners
- 4/9 Easter Breakfast at 9 AM & Worship Celebration

Let's ready our hearts for the greatest of Christian holy-days coming up soon on April 9th as we follow Christ on the way into Jerusalem, to the cross and to the empty grave. One of my favorite Easter songs is "Crown Him with Many Crowns" by Bridges and Thring. Here is one of the verses that stood out as I sang it during one of my daily quiet times:

*Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save;
His glories now we sing, who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.*

Easter reminds us that, just as our Savior rose victorious in the strife, so we are able to rise above the things that would hold us down and destroy us.

Spiritual growth I have no doubt that I have experienced the most spiritual growth during the hard times of my life, not the easy ones. The apostle Peter reminds us of this truth in 1 Peter 4:12-13. *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*

I owe much to the furnace and the hammer. I have made little progress in heavenly things except when I have been whipped by the great Schoolmaster. "The best piece of furniture in my house has been the cross." (Charles Spurgeon)

Wisely and lovingly God allows us to experience lows so he can raise us up to healing heights. "He permits us to become powerless on our own so that he can empower us in Christ. By the purifying fire of his love he empties us of our lowly self in order to fill us with his exalted self. The symbol of our faith, after all, is not a comfortable couch but a rugged cross." (Bruce Demarest)

What is troubling you? "Poverty? Loss? Failure? Inward and outward crosses? Look at all these things as genuine favors from the hand of God, distributed to his friends, favors he allows you to share." (Francois Fenelon)

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Just as Jesus came back from the dead, conquering our greatest foe, so we can rise above things that cause strife in our lives. As we prepare for Easter this year, we can choose to rejoice in the One who reigns in victory.

In the words of composer Aaron Williams,

*Rise up, O Church of God! Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and mind and soul and strength to serve the King of kings.*

*Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where His feet have trod;
As foll'wers of the Son of Man, Rise up, O Church of God.*



I Gave It Up for Lent

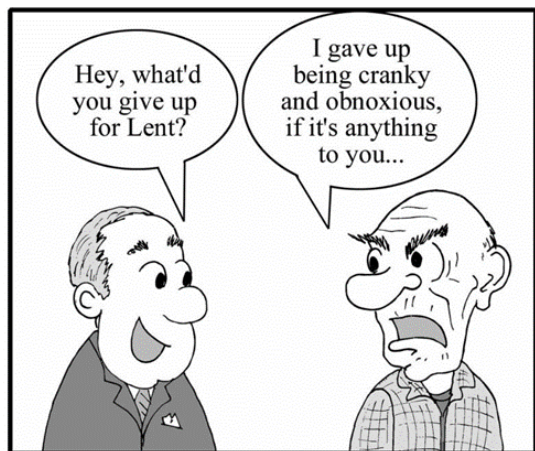
by Todd Wagner

Every year, when winter transitions into spring, we often hear a phrase uttered by many professing Christians as we enter the Lenten season. Whether you're at work or sharing a meal with friends at the restaurant or even at the movies, you will hear someone say, "I gave it up for Lent." But what exactly do they mean? And do you understand the meaning of Lent and the practice of giving up something for it? Historically, Lent is a season in the Church year that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter. The length of the season was established by the early Church in the 4th century A.D. and lasts 46 days (40 days if you exclude the 6 Sundays), which is modeled after Jesus' time in the desert before He began His ministry (Matt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13.) It is considered to be a season of preparation, consisting of fasting, moderation, and self-denial. Traditionally, Lent is observed by Catholics and some Protestant denominations, yet it is not exclusive to these groups of believers.

The intended purpose of Lenten observances was to remind oneself of repentance and turning back to God as the Jewish ancestors did in the Old Testament (Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:1-3; Jer. 6:26; Dan. 9:3.) Unfortunately, over time the observance of Lent has become much more sacrificial with men and focused on the individual. Often, people elect to give up something they enjoy or depend on, like cigarettes, alcohol, fast food, or chocolate. Others choose to fast from practices that don't necessarily make them better people, like gossiping or criticizing others. While the original intended purpose of Lenten's practices is a good thing, it was never meant to be a way of attaining God's

blessing through a work. Not only that, but the sacrifice itself means nothing if you're not completely devoting yourself to Christ and the Father. To give something up just because it's Lent leaves one's spirit open to temptation and the sin of pride.

By now you're probably wondering, how should we observe Lent if we so desire. Is there a right way to do it? To these questions, I tell you - yes, there is a right way. The appropriate way to observe Lent is with fasting and prayer. But you may ask, fasting from what? Can't I give up something I choose as a fasting sacrifice? Sure, you can but remember it's what **YOU** choose, and not what the Lord desires. If you truly wish to be



I Gave It Up for Lent (cont.)

by Todd Wagner

obedient, then don't place yourself above God with your choices. God's Word tells us exactly what to fast from. We are to fast from food. Recently, the deacons completed a study on the spiritual discipline of fasting and the benefits it produces. When a believer fasts, it is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. It is a denial of the one thing that is not only very enjoyable but necessary to sustain life.

Fasting helps you to completely devote yourself to God and strengthen your spiritual discipline. In his book, *"Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life,"* Pastor and author Donald Whitney rightly states, "Believers should fast according to biblical teaching and with purposes that are God-centered." This is why Jesus denied Himself food for 40 days while He was in the desert. While He fasted, He spent time in prayer seeking God's guidance and the ability to overcome temptation while in the flesh. He is the model for us when we fast. If fasting teaches us one thing, especially in today's world, it is a way to refresh and dedicate ourselves to God. But I would encourage you to not just fast during the Lenten season, but to fast throughout the year. The reason is that fasting is expected of every believer. Just as prayer is expected of us, so too is fasting. In Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus teaches us that fasting is desired by God. In the first three words of his teaching, Jesus says, "**When you fast.**" He never says, if you fast or when you consider fasting. He is specific in implying that His disciples should fast. He then goes on to explain how we are to fast.

So, when you fast, do so with a purpose. Even if it's for just half a day. When Jesus was fasting in the desert and was tempted, He spoke the words written in Scripture to refute Satan, speaking from Deuteronomy 8:3 saying "...**man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**" Use the time that you normally would spend eating to talk with God in prayer. Build your relationship with God through prayer and reading His Word. This is what the Lord desires of us. This is how we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, conforming us more into the likeness of our Savior.

And if you want to know how to fast in a way that pleases God the most, look to Isaiah 58 which speaks to true fasting. In verses 6-7, we read about the kind of fasting that the LORD has chosen for us, the kind that is pleasing to Him is the kind that results in concern for others and not just ourselves. In other words, when you choose to fast, you can also use that time to serve others when not in prayer or reading God's Word. Are these biblical teachings ringing a bell? I hope so, because they are taught throughout the Bible, and summed up by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40.

So, as you observe the Lenten season, set aside time to focus on Jesus, His ministry, His death, and His resurrection. Confess your sin and repent, turning to God who freely forgives not just during this Lenten season, but daily throughout the entire year. And if you desire to observe Lent biblically to prepare your heart for the Holy week, do so with fasting, prayer, and a purpose. Without a God-centered purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience.

The key is to consecrate ourselves to God, to "...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship", Romans 12:1.



NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Friday, April 28 at 6:00 PM

We're planning a lock-in for our Awake group. We'll start with dinner at the church prior to our Night at the Museum experience at the Old Jail Museum.

The fun will continue back at church for a sleepover and conclude with Saturday breakfast. See Sue Belden for more details.

Sign-up is required to participate.



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AND GROWING KIDS IN THE GOSPEL.**

Upcoming Events

The days are getting longer. Lots of great things are happening at First Congregational Church.

- **Sunday, April 30, Compassion Sunday**
Dennis Wells will be speaking during the service on God's call in his life to help a child in need. Check out this link to learn about Patience's Journey in Uganda.
<https://journey.compassion.com/digital/experience/patience/661034>
- **Tuesday, May 9th at 6 PM Ladies' Banquet**
Come join us for an evening of fellowship, food, and laughs. Our program will be fairly delightful as we share a meal together and enjoy Allegan's own life encourager and sister in Christ, Becky Wallace, as our keynote speaker.
- **Friday, May 12, CCCC Spring Conference** will be hosted at FCC.
- **Sunday, May 21** FCC to host a special worship service followed by an ice cream social. We'll end the day at the Allegan Aquatic Center for a Pool Party from 4-6 PM.



Happy Anniversary

04 Barry & Denise Lucas

04 Guy Berkhausen
 05 Jeff Polonowski
 10 Dennis Wells
 12 Breanna Brown
 16 Ella Hiscock
 20 Carrie Lovett

26 Wayne Kooy
 30 Mary Scurio
 Jennifer Miller



Please call the office if there is an anniversary or birthday you would like to add to the list.

APRIL 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship <i>Hosanna!</i>	3	4	5 5:45 Prayer Mtg	6 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner 7 Maundy Thursday Service	7 8 Food Warehouse 7 Good Friday Service at the Baptist Church	8 8:30 Men's Breakfast
He Lives! 9 7 Sunrise Service 9 Breakfast 10:30 Worship 	10 5:30 Women's Fellowship Mtg	11 7 Diaconate Mtg	12 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	13 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner 7 Trustee Meeting	14 8 Food Warehouse	15
16 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	17	18	19 5:45 Prayer Mtg	20 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	21 8 Food Warehouse	22
23 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	24	25	26 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	27 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	28 8 Food Warehouse	29
Compassion SUNDAY 30 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Noon Quarterly Meeting						LITURGIST: Jeff Brown GREETER: Jeff Polonowski

The First Congregational Church of Allegan



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Worship with us on Sundays at 10:30 AM!

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



The Greatest Story Ever Told

HOLY WEEK

Once Upon A Time...isn't that how every good story begins? A plot develops and diverts over and through obstacles. A brave hero navigates the path, his character being defined in each step. With him, the reader, too, experiences character shaping. A climax is reached and resolved until ... *The End.* The finishing of a great story can be bitter sweet.

Not so with the Resurrection. All of the Bible, points toward Jesus. He is the Golden Thread that runs through every page of scripture. God knew the consequence of sin (death) would only be defeated by One who was sinless. Jesus laid down his life for you and me. He didn't stay dead. He arose from that grave and provided a bridge for believers to be reconciled into a right relationship with God, the Father.

As you prepare for Holy Week this year, travel fully through the story, not just Palm Sunday skip to Easter Sunday. You'll miss the trial, the cross, the death. Come to a Thursday or Friday service, or in your devotions reflect upon Jesus' death on the cross. *Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Heb. 12:2)

The greatest story ever told starts *In the Beginning...* and it doesn't end at the Resurrection. The Lord Jesus will come again. In the final chapter in Revelation, He tells us, "Look, I am coming soon! ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and *The End.*"