

McCabe United Methodist Church

Lent 2017 Series: The Idols We Love: A Holy Tug-of-War

“The Idols We Love: A Holy Tug-of-War”

Sermon on Ash Wednesday, 03/01/17

Pastor Jenny Hallenbeck Orr

God of heaven and earth, you alone are holy. You alone should be the object of our worship. You alone are the Creator and the Giver of every good and perfect gift we receive in this life. May these words I now speak, and may all our thoughts, be in line with your heart; in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Two weeks ago, I gathered right here in the sanctuary to lead a lesson about Lent with our McCabe Confirmation students and many of their parents. As they were gathering for the lesson, I had them take a written quiz about the season of Lent. Not surprisingly, some of them did very well on the quiz, while others did less well.

I thought it might be kind of fun to give you all a taste of this quiz. So, I hope you'll be brave and call out answers to these questions – all of which were on the quiz I gave our Confirmation students and parents two weeks ago.

That said, if you are one of our Confirmation students – or one of the parents who was here two weeks ago – don't give away the answers... unless no one else is answering! Okay. Here we go!

Question number one: **What exactly is Lent?**

Answer: *The 40-day season of spiritual preparation leading up to Easter.*

Question number two: **When does Lent begin?**

Answer: *On Ash Wednesday – today! That may have been an easy one?!*

Question number three: **There is a special name for the day before Lent begins – what is it?**

Answer: *“Fat Tuesday” or, in French, “Mardi Gras.” Extra, non-existent points if you happened to know, in some cultures, Mardi Gras is celebrated not only as a day, but as an entire season ahead of Lent. In those cultures – down in Louisiana, for example – the season of Mardi Gras begins the day after Epiphany, January 7th, and lasts until the day before Ash Wednesday.*

Question number four: **Where is “Lent” mentioned in the Bible?**

Answer: Nowhere. A trick question! However, even though Lent itself is never mentioned in the Bible, the fact that it is a 40-day season is reminiscent of the story we just heard about the 40 days Jesus spent fasting and praying in the desert. Those 40 days were a time of intense spiritual preparation for the public ministry Jesus was about to begin.

Question number five: **Sometimes people give something up for Lent. We call this a Lenten fast. Why might they do this?**

Answer: For two reasons...one, because Jesus fasted from food during his 40 days in the desert, so any Lenten fast in which we participate calls to mind Jesus' own fast... And, two, because Lent is a journey toward Jesus' sacrifice on Good Friday.

A fast of some sort during Lent calls to mind the sacrifice Jesus offered as he went to the cross. Fasting in some way, shape, or form during Lent invites us to give up a luxury we love as a sign of thanks for Jesus' loving sacrifice for us. A Lenten fast also reminds us of our dependence on God for provision... it reminds us we are not dependent upon the chocolate or the soda or the alcohol or the TV we choose to give up.

Ash Wednesday is a time to bring to God your burdens: the sins you commit, the grudges you nurse, the disappointments you hold, the worry you carry... the idols you worship...

Ash Wednesday is a time to bring all these to God in confession, leaving them in prayer at the foot of the cross and dedicating this Lenten season as a season of confession and repentance.