

## **“WHY I LOVE LENT”**

Sermon Text – Mark 1:9-15  
Sat. & Sun., Feb. 17 & 18, 2018  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent, Series B  
Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL  
Old Testament Reading – Genesis 22:1-18  
Epistle Reading – James 1:12-18  
Gospel Reading – Mark 1:9-15

**NOTE: Shown below are the notes that I took into the pulpit to preach this sermon. HOWEVER, the sermon actually delivered was only a shadow of these notes! For some reason, the Spirit prompted me to preach it differently each time I entered the pulpit – on Sat. evening and Sun. morning. You are urged to listen to the actual sermon as it was delivered on Sunday morning using this link to our YouTube account: <https://youtu.be/vUlr6eGLaOM>**

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

I love Lent... but for whatever reason... “why?”

Some people don't do well with Lent... because... according to them... Lent is downright depressing. Their hymns in church are often in the minor key... “on the order of a funeral dirge” many naysayers of Lent would claim.

They'd much rather the Season of Lent not exist at all... thus allowing the church to focus on “victorious living” as most – but thankfully, not all – of the TV preachers do.

But make no mistake, Lent is all about victory... but it's victory on God's terms... it's victory as He brings it about... not what fickle, feeble man dreams up. And... for that reason... I love Lent!

I love Lent... because it doesn't take a Pollyannaish look at the Christian life. It takes a long, hard look at it. It's as real as it can be... in its assessment of life in this fallen world for us. Lent is gritty and not afraid to wrestle in the dirt... with the hard questions of Christianity and the challenges of living the Christian life day by day... year after year. And... through all of this... there is the victory that Lent is ultimately all about.

Lent is a paradox in a world that wants easy answers. Lent doesn't hide behind beautiful pictures of the Christian life that so often are promised to people who are hurting.

No! Lent steps right into the very real world of hurt, pain, letdown, & anguish that we live... and it embraces it.

Lent doesn't ignore the truth... that there are very real threats to the Christian life and our fragile faith.

A case in point... is what was laid out for us in today's Gospel reading. There... we see our Lord Jesus meet temptation head on in His battle with Satan. And... it's easy for us to connect the dots... and see that if the devil would tempt Jesus... then we'd be fools to think that Satan would keep his hands off of us!

I love Lent because it goes against so much of what our society values. Lent forces me to examine what it really means to be a Christian... to live in a society with people who sometimes aren't so nice to you... where you have to patiently wait until God calls you to His eternal home.

When society tells me that I “deserve” certain things... Lent quickly cuts me down to size... and reminds me that when all is said & done... I am a poor miserable sinner... deserving *only* to be banned to hell forever!

With Lent... there's something freeing in being shown things as they really *are* rather than as I would like them to be... but with no hope of them ever being that way.

There's something enormously gratifying about knowing that even as I live around hundreds... even thousands of other people... my real home *isn't* of this world!

Uh uhhh... even as I live here... I know that heaven is my real home... and that I while I live on this earth... I'm called by God to take up my cross and follow Him... to serve Him and those around me... with my time, my talents... and even my treasure.

Lent is above all a time of repentance... and I love that. Why? Because I need that.

I love it because what I really love the most... in my heart of hearts... in my inner being... and at the core of who I am... what I love the most... ***is myself!***

When God says “**You shall have no other gods,**” He says it... because He knows who I am through & through.

He knows that I'm always looking... to make *myself* to be God... but repentance *shatters* all of that.

Lent allows me to see that in my sin... I no longer have the status of being a noble child of God as God intended for me at creation. But in repentance and faith in Christ... I take up anew... that status that God wishes that I have... to be His own child once again.

But... no, make no mistake about either... repentance isn't fun... *at all!* You see... I don't love Lent... and I don't love repentance *because they're fun...* or even a bit enjoyable. Uh uhh!

But Lent is real. Lent has substance.

Usually... my thoughts... my desires... my wants... are always “me-centered”... that is... I'm more concerned about myself... than anyone else. But Lent... but Lent... well... it points me *outward*.

Yeah... refreshingly... Lent points me to something other than myself... bigger than myself... and something far more noble and honorable than myself and my inborn sin.. and wretched nature.

You see... Lent... at its essence... points me to Christ. *That's* why I love Lent. Lent shows me Christ. It teaches me Christ. It proclaims God's love to me ***in spite*** of the truth of my own sinfulness.

There is very good reason that the First Sunday in Lent always has as its focus the Temptation of Christ. Temptation is real. It's hard-hitting. After all... if it was real... if it was hard-hitting for Jesus... how could it *not* be even more so for us?

And through this... we see that temptation isn't something to be ignored or *ever* – under any circumstances – should it be underestimated.

Certainly also... temptation isn't to be dealt with on my own. I'm one who all so often... listens to the voice of Satan as he tempts me to walk with him... *and away* from the Lord Jesus... who loves me so.

Again... all of this... is why I love Lent. Because it the words... the symbols... even the hymns of Lent... show me with brutal clarity... what I can't know within myself. Lent shows me that there's something else... Someone else. And that something, that someone, is Christ.

Dear Christians... don't ever let anyone fool you into believing that Christianity is easy... that it's a glorious life. There are those who will tell you that you'll eventually come to a point where you'll overcome sin, and it won't plague you any longer!

Those same false teachers might even tell you that you'll reach a point where you're more spiritual... or a more faithful Christian... than are other Christians.

But... really? When you look within yourself... when you stare into your eyes in the bathroom mirror... you know differently, don't you? You are nothing else than a poor miserable sinner... and Lent tells you that. That's why I love Lent.

So... during this Season of Lent... look at yourself... and see yourself for who and what you are... a sinner standing before almighty God. But, also, you gotta... you haffta also look at your Savior from your sin! Look at Christ and see once again with crystal clarity the God who loves you and has saved you by His blood and wondrous resurrection from the dead!

Go home in peace and joy. Your sins – all of them, every one of them – are forgiven and forgotten in Christ Jesus!

So... that's way I love Lent... and my utter hope is that YOU will love it too! For Jesus' sake, and in His holy name! [Amen.]