

Grace Lutheran Church
Monthly Letter February, 2015

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18 this year. Christians have observed this season of the church year since the fourth century. It's traditionally a time of reflection, penitence and spiritual renewal before Easter.

During Lent, some Christians give up something that hinders their relationship with God. Others do something extra for their spiritual growth or make a special sacrifice. The key is to make Lent a memorable season of sincere spiritual growth – a time that can set the tone for the rest of the year.

Commandment #11

During the 17th century, an archbishop traveling through Scotland met theologian Samuel Rutherford but kept his identity secret. Rutherford invited the man to stay with him. When Mrs. Rutherford gathered the servants on Saturday to prepare for worship the next day, the guest joined in and was asked a basic question: "How many commandments are there?" When the guest replied "11," Mrs. Rutherford said, "What a shame it is for you, a man with gray hairs, in a Christian country, not to know how many commandments there are!"

The next morning, Rev. Rutherford went out in the woods to pray and heard his guest doing likewise. When he discovered the archbishop's identity, Rutherford invited him to preach that morning. The archbishop's topic? The 11th commandment, based on Jesus' words in John 13:34 – "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another" (ESV). May we always love one another as Christ loved us.

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103)

Recently I was confronted with this question: If you fed yourself with food the way you feed yourself with God's Word, would you still be alive? It gave me time to think.

Do I eat *enough* spiritually? – feast regularly enough on Word and Sacrament to keep up my energy and the health of my soul? Do I eat *nutritiously*? – take in a balanced meal of law and gospel, comfort and commandments, prophecy and promise? Do I pass up spiritual *junk food*? – set aside empty calories that lead to disease, in order to hunger for what truly gives life? Do I drink enough *Living Water* to avoid faith dehydration? And once in a while, do I *splurge on dessert*? – savor the sweetness and joy of belonging at God's table?

What abundance God sets before us. May we never skip a "meal"!

Pure love for Jesus

Jesus has always many who love his heavenly kingdom, but few who bear his cross. He has many who desire consolation, but few who care for trial. He finds many to share his table, but few to take part in his fasting. All desire to be happy with him; few wish to suffer anything for him. Many follow him to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of his passion. Many revere his miracles; few approach the shame of the cross. Many love him as long as they encounter no hardship; many praise and bless him as long as they receive some comfort from him. ... Those, on the contrary, who love Jesus for his own sake and not for any comfort of their own, bless him in all trial and anguish of heart as well as in the bliss of consolation. ... What power there is in pure love for Jesus – love that is free from all self-interest and self-love!

In His Service

Pastor Ken Serr