

## Simplicity: Less Stuff, More Freedom

Hebrews 13:5-6 (NIV) <sup>5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” <sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

Watch this video clip about Lent from CNN. (It's the segment from 3:46 to 5:37)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfBF6Y0\\_T9k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfBF6Y0_T9k)

So what is Lent really about?

- Our culture mostly thinks of it as “giving things up”, wouldn't you say?
- It can almost seem like a carry-over from new year's resolutions.
- I give up something that's bad for me – or not so good – and then I feel better about myself.
- So we give up “luxuries” like chocolate, red meat, or even Facebook for some these days.

But really, Lent is about something deeper.

- Actually the word means “spring”.
- The German root literally means “to lengthen” – because with spring, the days get longer, like we've just experienced with Daylight Savings Time.
- But the Latin and Greek words for Lent, actually tell us more.
- It means the 40th day before Easter. So what did the first Christians have in mind?
- Probably, they were thinking of the 40 days that Jesus spent fasting in the desert before starting his public ministry.
- In the wilderness, Jesus faced, endured, and surmounted temptations by Satan.
- So we begin to get the picture.

- Lent is much more than “giving up stuff” – fasting from one's favorite indulgences.

Lent's meaning is starkly real and immensely needed: It is about our spiritual rededication as believers and as the church to our purpose in this world.

- Let's face it – we get off track, we can easily lose track of why we started this journey of faith in the first place.
- Lent is about getting in touch with the core of our faith – our deep need for Jesus, and his free and sacrificial gift of himself for us. It's about getting in touch with what it means to follow him.

We all get in spiritual ruts: It's always been this way. It's easy to just “go through the motions”, right? To come to church because you've always come.

- It was this way in the Old Testament.
- And the Lord says this of our religious pretense.

21 “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. 24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:21-23 (NIV)

The simple truth is this: We won't grow in faith unless we go through the destruction of our false-self.

- Now, the false-self has many faces – self-love, self-pity, self-hatred, self-justification, self-righteousness, self-glorification, self-pride - to name a few.
- To grow in grace is not automatic or easy: It comes from the vigorous, practical determination to hold our lives to the way of Jesus.
- We grow in grace as we consistently abide in His presence, and walk in the way of Jesus.

This is what Lent is really about. If we are to be like Jesus in our world, then our journey here on earth must mirror His life's journey– from baptism to withstanding temptation, to loving service, to its culmination in Holy Week.

- Lent is the time to spiritually reenact in our souls the purposeful order of Jesus' journey. It includes,
  - repentance and baptism, engaging the powers and principalities of the world, clarifying and claiming our mission, preparation, ministry, proclamation, rejection, healing, and resurrection.

One of those ways of Jesus is simplicity. That's our focus today.

- If you think about it, the life of Jesus was one of utter simplicity.
- He was born in a stable. He grew up a carpenter's son in a small village. As he ministered, he went from place to place, supported by those around him.

- We might wonder, “Is it really possible to follow the simplicity of the life of Christ TODAY?”

Look at us! We live in the most consumeristic society in history!

- Yet still, Jesus calls us to the freedom of simplicity.
- Think about it: In America we have storage units galore.
- We have so much stuff that we cannot even fit what we have in our homes any longer.
- Fifty percent of Americans renting storage units are simply storing what wouldn't fit in their homes – even though the size of the average American house has almost doubled in the last 50 years.

Why do we have so much stuff? Well, for one, because we are constantly bombarded by messages that tell us we need more.

- Yet, our credit cards and debt, and all the extra stuff that accumulates in our storage units has not served to free us. We have become prisoners to our “stuff”.
- The simplicity of Jesus asks us to deliberately say “no” to those things we do not need.

Problem is, we've been so shaped by the world around us, it's sometimes hard to know the difference between a want and a need.

- So it really starts here. Intentionally and consciously asking what is a want and what is a need.
- When we do so, we begin to realize how very little we really do need.

When we simplify our needs, freedom to be more generous is a result.

- When we spend and accumulate less, there is more room to give.
- Let's face it – the stuff we own, can easily start to own us.

When we went to the Philippines in 2000 we were amazed at how much stuff we had amassed without even trying.

- Here we were living in suburban Atlanta – a fairly typical middle class family.
- Yet, it took us a while to pare things down.
  - We had yard sales
  - We gave stuff away.
  - We were amazed at how much stuff we had!
- Yet, you know what? There was a wonderful freedom in not having so much stuff.
- As missionaries it was nice to travel lighter!
- It gave us a new sort of freedom.

Now, we're back in the States – it seems it's easier to accumulate more stuff.

- In fact, I can't wait for spring in order to do some spring cleaning.
- We clearing out the garage, clearing out our junk room, taking clothes we haven't worn in a while to Good Will. Maybe, contribute stuff to a yard sale.
- What's the way of simplicity about?
- It's about realizing there's a basic difference between what we want and what we need.

So how do we live more simply?

- It begins from the inside and works it's way out.
- We need to become more simple inside – then it will begin to affect how we live.
- As we close today, let me suggest a way to start.

Take a few minutes and make a list of two columns. In one column list your current needs. In the other column list your current wants.

- Look at each item on each list. Do we really need the things in the “need” column? Are there needs that are actually “wants”?
- Then, take your piece of paper and take a look at your heart. In the Lord's presence, ask yourself some questions;
  - “Lord, what does having stuff mean to me? Am I trusting in things for security, for status?
  - “Lord, am I afraid of what others will think of me if I have less and live with less?
  - “Lord, how can I be more giving and generous by simplifying my needs.” And then pray ...
  - “Lord, thank you for providing all my needs and more. I want to trust you to provide for every need, and to remember my security comes from you and not from material goods. Give me a generous heart.”

And that's Jesus' way of simplicity.

- It's his way to experience less stuff in our lives, and more freedom.
- May our Lord lead us to be more like Him, by experiencing the grace of simplicity.

**As we close today, and take a moment to watch this music video and contemplate Jesus' great love for us, supremely expressed in his sacrifice for us on the cross. Peace!**