

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR

Well, I suppose I should write something here about Lent, the season of reflection and penance leading up to Easter. The first time I ever heard of Lent and giving things up for those forty (plus) days was when my brother and I were with our cousin in the woods behind his house, swearing like sailors. After a beautiful string of curses, he swore again and said, "I'm giving up swearing for Lent." We asked what the \$*%& Lent was, and he gave us an explanation that would have left his priest confused. Then we went back to impressing one another with artistic combinations of sounds and meaning only early adolescent boys can create.

Lent: you're supposed to give up stuff you like to show God you're serious.

It seems like in my teen years, our Congregational Church liked to emphasize the practice of "taking up, rather than giving up," a pretty common theme for middle-of-the-road Protestants. Maybe you could pray consistently, read some devotional literature, plan to volunteer more, etc. Lent becomes not a time to relinquish oneself but a kind of New Year's resolution, a chance for self-improvement.

I guess that's good marketing, the way mindfulness has been sold to Silicone Valley tech bros or yoga has been stripped of its religious meaning, repackages, imbued with spirituality light, and sold again to middle-class Americans.

The practice of Lent, beginning with ashes and ending with crucifixion, isn't pleasant. But there's something about intentionally engaging with unpleasant things that can reframe the unexpected horrors we sometimes face.

When it's doing its best, Lent invites people into an experience of loss and lack, not into feeling whole and complete, not accomplishing goals and tasks. It's an experience of coming to terms with the totality of being human. To be human is to be vulnerable. To be human is to fail.

Lent wrecks and resurrects God in our intimate experiences.

It isn't enjoyable to entertain your vulnerability. It's not something we like to celebrate. But it can be transformative to embrace your lack, your emptiness, your failing. It's transformative to embrace your lack of faith and the faith you think is foolish. It's transformative to sit with ghosts, demons, and darkness.

I hope you don't read this as dismissing intentional practices like giving up swearing or taking up yoga or volunteering more. Those are important practices. I hope some of you engage them and find them transformative.

I have a few lenten resource recommendations. I won't practice all of them, but you might find them helpful. I hope that the links will digitally whisk you to websites you can use to engage these.

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Twenty-five years ago, I read [*The Orphean Passages*](#) by Walter Wangerin. I recently ordered it to read again this Lent. It's a story of wrecked and resurrected faith, of believing through force and forced loss of faith.

The movie [*Silence*](#) is a story of faith and loss of faith, of laying something down and taking something up. It's available on a number of streaming platforms.

[*Atheism for Lent*](#) is a course Peter Rollins has run for a number of years. It's mainly readings and reflections. Probably not for the faint of heart. It can wreck and resurrect, but it is acid for the soul.

Tripp Fuller and Diana Butler Bass are offering a pop-up community called [*Jesus De/constructed: Rediscover the Freaking Awesome Jesus*](#) this Lent. These will be conversations between friends that ask you to lay down some assumptions and find something new.

Hopefully, something will jump out at you that will wreck and resurrect your faith. If you've got other cool resources, let me know.