

LENT 2010

Fix your eyes on Jesus.

No distractions.

Based on Hebrews 12:1,2

Many people “give up” something for Lent. This has become so much of a Christian cultural norm that it often loses its meaning and potential. Why do we give up TV or chocolate or shopping? It is not to lose some weight or trim our budgets. It is to make space in our lives for Christ. Lent is a time when we allow God to peel away the layers of our outer and inner lives to reveal that which needs cleansing and refining. As we say “no” to those layers, we are enabled to say “yes” to Jesus, and allow the transforming work of God’s Spirit in our hearts.

Removing Distractions

As we journey through Lent at the Grantham Church this year, our times of corporate worship will reflect a process of intentionally removing distractions that can keep us from focusing on Christ. We’ll do this in several ways, some of which may feel familiar, and some of which may make us uncomfortable. As with any Lenten discipline, the point is not discomfort, inconvenience or pain. Rather, the goal is to help us become image-bearers of Christ, to be transformed into His likeness and to encounter God more deeply.

Making Room

Another way in which our corporate worship will reflect our inner journey this Lent is through the changes that will take place at the front of the sanctuary. Plants, decorations and even some furniture will slowly be removed until only the Christ candle and crown of thorns remains. This is to signify the inner removal of those things that can clutter our hearts and minds, and distract us from listening fully to God and allowing Him room to move in our lives.

Light

One of the changes that will serve as a visual aid in our journey through Lent will be a change in light. During Advent, we anticipated the coming of Christ by lighting the candles on the Advent wreath, one for each of the four weeks in Advent. On Christmas Eve, we lit the Christ candle, signifying Christ’s presence and life as Emmanuel, “God with us.” Through Epiphany the Christ candle remained in our midst to signify Christ being illumined to us in personal encounters with Him. Now, as we enter Lent, the Christ candle remains to remind us of Christ’s journey through the wilderness in preparation for ministry and his walk on the road to the cross through Holy Week. During the weeks of Lent, the Christ candle will also “journey” throughout the sanctuary to reflect Jesus’ walk. On Good Friday, the day we observe Christ’s death on the cross, we will slowly extinguish all the light in the sanctuary except the Christ candle, which will be removed from our presence, still lit. This is to remind us of Christ’s bodily death and three days in the tomb. The light will not return until Easter when we celebrate the glorious resurrection of Christ and His gift of eternal life and light in our lives!

Quieting Our Minds

In addition to the removal of some of the visual elements of our corporate worship gatherings, we will also be adjusting some of the auditory elements. Our sung and spoken worship will gradually become simpler...quieter...more meditative. We do this not to devalue the words and songs that we raise together, but rather to remind ourselves that, in order to listen to God, we must sometimes quiet our voices. As we gradually simplify the auditory layers of our worship services, we are invited to likewise quiet the mental noise—reminders, to-do lists, criticisms, obligations, pride, etc.—that interferes with our ability to hear and receive God’s transformative word. At the end of each service, you will be invited to share your reflections of God’s voice to you through our songs, prayers, scripture readings and sermon of the morning.

Surrender to God

As we move through Lent toward Holy Week, we want to identify with Christ’s life in us. The point of it all is not to focus on what is removed, but to rejoice over what is gained--to say “no” in order to say “yes” to Jesus in our lives. We hope that these visual and auditory cues will function as a helpful and meaningful Lenten discipline for each of us—individually and corporately. May they be reminders to surrender to God not only as we enter worship on Sundays, but as we worship in work, school, rest and play throughout the forty days of Lent.