



Monthly Stewardship Sermon March 2009



“What did you give up for Lent?”

In church circles, Lent has become almost as popular as New Year’s resolutions and just about as meaningful. For the same reasons we don’t make resolutions, we don’t make changes during Lent. We have failed so often, we are not going to bother. In our church culture we have all become aware of the “spiritual games” around Lent. There are all kinds of jokes about people who have given something up, only to find a cute way around their “sacrifice.” So we tell folks that we are giving up Lent for Lent.

While some Lenten disciplines call for giving up, others challenge us to “take up.” The forty days of Lent are a great time to “take up” a new habit or spiritual discipline in your life. One spiritual discipline that might challenge us in our stewardship practice is to discover the joy of delayed gratification. That sentence has a strange combination, the *joy* of *delayed* gratification. There can’t be any joy and putting off being gratified. Gratification means we want what we want when we want it and we are happy only when we get it.

We are learning that economic change comes slowly. Even with bailouts and stimulus plans, we can’t expect to see any difference anytime soon. Our instant culture has ruined our perspective. We do not wish to delay anything.

Many of our parents lived through the Great Depression. The Depression lasted nearly a decade. Back in the 30’s, the only source of news came daily at your front door. Now that we live in the age of 24-hour news networks, I can only imagine the gloom they can produce sharing the economic news of our current recession. (We want solutions to this instant bad news, just as quickly.) Would our perspective on hard times be different if we had discovered the *joy* of *delayed* gratification? What if, by learning to delay gratification we discover the joy of patience? Isn’t patience the last of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians?

Would we be different people if we learned to turn off our “wanter?” Jesus told a story about a man who had great luck growing grains. His luck was so good that he wanted to build bigger barns. He wanted to have the easy life after his construction project. That farmer wanted “lots.” Jesus said there was only one problem that the farmer wouldn’t live to receive his wants. The farmer seems to be the poster boy for “grabbing the gusto” now.

The farmer was looking for gratification in the things of culture. Learning the joy of delayed gratification is learning how to say “no” to the things culture tells us will make us happy. Our economy is driven by the premise that your life is what you own and what you have. To have a happy life, you need things and you need them NOW.

So what if we take up the new habit of delaying our gratification? How would that change the way we spend and the way we live? Wouldn’t we be more Christ like if we were “traveling lighter? Wouldn’t we then find joy as a spiritual truth and not the sum total of our stuff?