

Let us pray,

Lord, give us the strength to choose you over everything else in this life.

Amen.

What are we willing to give up for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel?

As we see in today's Gospel, John the Baptist gave up his freedom as he was put in prison.

And eventually gave up his life, by the hands of the Roman Government.

Simon, who is now Peter, along with his brother, gave up being fisherman, their main source of income and security to follow Jesus and fish for people.

And both of them, also eventually lost their lives by the hands of the Roman Government.

And we all know what happened to Jesus.

What are we willing to give up for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel?

You know, as we get closer to lent, I think it is important that we all start thinking about the things in our lives that might be getting in the way of following Jesus, and consider removing them from our lives during this season of lent.

There has been some movement in modern times, to get away from the idea of deprivation during lent.

The thought is that, not everyone is able to give something up, because only those who have things, are able to give up things. So the idea is that the concept of giving something up for lent is able-istic.

And instead, we might be encouraged to do something, or add something that is beneficial.

Like being kinder to ourselves, giving more time or money, being kinder to other people, etc.

Those are all good things.

But I think this traditional time of deprivation during lent is good and important.

I am not saying to get rid of everything you love doing during lent.

But it is important that we work on this muscle of being able to give things up for God.

One day we will have to give up our bodies, and it will not be our choice to do so.

And the thing that God wants us to do now, especially since tomorrow is never guaranteed, is to start to learn to give up our material possessions and loves, for the sake of God and God's Gospel.

We have the extremes of being willing to go to prison and to die for God.

But there are also smaller aspects of life that we can give up to start with.

It helps us answer this question:

What parts of our lives are we not willing to give up for God?

The modern age Christianity, I think has toned down Christianity a lot.

It is actually quite the demanding religion.

If we truly listen and follow what God says in the Gospels.

It is all consuming.

It is important to remember that Peter, Andrew, and basically all of the disciples had wives.

Families.

Jobs.

And they left all of them to follow Jesus.

The disciples had much to lose, and they lost a lot following Jesus.

But the trade off was, that they gained Jesus.

And for the disciples, Jesus was enough.

So the question for us and our lenten journey is:

Is Jesus enough?

Could we leave everything, and I mean everything, if Jesus called us to do so?

I am being honest with you, I do not know what my answer to that question is.

I want it to be yes, but my heart is telling me a different answer.

But that is why we have lent.

That is why we have spiritual practices, worship, sermons, sacraments, community, to help us to get to the point of saying yes.

You know the false wisdom of the world is that the more we accumulate the happier we will be.

But that is a false narrative and truth.

The reality is, that the more we own, the more we are trapped by it.

The more we have, the harder it becomes to give any of it up.

This is just human nature.

Jesus calls us to be different, to live differently, to be strong enough and willing enough, that if called, to give it all away to follow Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist, Peter, Andrew and all of Jesus followers and disciples, gave up everything to follow him.

And Jesus calls us to do the same.

I want to be clear, we are not doing any of this so that we become worthy of God's love.

God already us.

We do this, because we want to live into the love that God has for us all of God's creation.

When we say a complete yes to God, we say a complete yes to Grace, Mercy, Love, Forgiveness and self sacrifice for others.

The ability to give up things in our lives, isn't designed to make us worthy.

Its to help us get in the flow of creation, rather than fight it.

There is a river with a strong current, and we will be pushed down that river to God, no matter what we do.

But the choice we have today, is to lay on our backs and float down that river, following the flow, rather than fighting it.

Lent will help us do that, one small step at a time.

Think about the thing that you are worried about giving up, and give that thing up for and to God.

Let us work together on our muscles of depravity, so that our hearts, souls, minds and lives, may be open for the fullness of Christ's truth and Gospel.

So that we may become full participants in the flow of God's river of Grace.

Because in the end, Jesus is all that matters.

And Jesus is all there is.

Amen.