

Bermudian Church of the Brethren

WEDNESDAY's WORD – a midweek thought from Pastor Larry M. Dentler
to share a word of inspiration ... encouragement ... challenge ... a smile ... in the middle of your week
November 30 in the year of our Lord 2016 - #674 **FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT**

What Are You Giving Up For Advent?

A discussion at home between grandson Jericho and his Mom made me chuckle. Jessie was telling him that the toy area needed cleaned up and that they were going to go thru the toys and get rid of some that he really doesn't play with to make room for new things coming this Christmas. Jericho was a little bit uncertain about that!

It made me think of the ancient Advent custom of giving something up.....
Oh wait ... that's Lent isn't it?? Well what do you expect from a non-liturgical old Brethren guy? Maybe we'll start a new custom!

Advent ... marking the days leading up to Christmas ... is an ancient practice of Christianity that dates back to at least the fourth century, perhaps even earlier. Though it is often omitted from worship & practice in non-liturgical traditions, it is a wonderful practice that helps one keep Christmas focused on its true meaning of celebrating the Gift of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem's manger as our Savior. We light an additional candle on each of the four Sundays before Christmas, and then a larger Christ-candle on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The time remembers the 'waiting' of Israel for Messiah; and the 'waiting' of Christians today for Christ's return. And is so appropriate to use as a teaching tool with children who so eagerly 'wait' for Christmas.

So often, especially in our culture Christmas is all about More! Everything switches into high gear! The decorations, the baking, the cards, the shopping, the parties, the concerts.....! But maybe ... just maybe ... we could start to think of "giving something up" to help us celebrate with Christ!

In 1994 I wrote a little prayer for our worship at Bermudian.

**"O Lord let it be a Christmas of More!
NOT more rush, BUT more hush;
NOT more presents, BUT more of your Presence;
NOT more to do, BUT more of YOU!"**

It makes me sad when the fun & wonderful things of the season become a terrible stress to people who feel overwhelmed to do it all! Perhaps having a wife who has walked a long journey with disability has helped me to appreciate God's grace to do less! We just can't do all the things we once did in the season.

So let me challenge you to give something up this Advent! Here are some ideas ... perhaps you can think of others.

1. Give up anything that is a 'joy sucker.' That first Christmas was filled with joy! The angels sang of joy! The shepherds ran through town telling of their experience with joy! Mary prayed full of joy! Elizabeth greeted Mary with joy! So what sucks the joy from your celebration? Is there a practice or tradition that no longer gives you joy? Does sending Christmas cards fill you with joy ... or has it become a burden? Does stringing the lights up the gables become something you dread ... simplify! Does the 8 foot live Christmas tree just warm your heart ... or is it just a hassle? Try something simpler ... smaller. Is baking 50 dozen of 25 kinds of cookies something you look so forward to? Does it become opportunity to bless others in Jesus' Name as you share them? Or is it a terrible stressful thing on your "to do" list?

What if you are dealing with a health condition? What if you are far away from loved ones? What if you've lost a loved one recently? What if the holiday deepens the pain of a broken relationship? Give up anything that deepens your pain or piles on stress and *'sucks your joy!'* Start a new tradition. Do something very different. Enjoy a Christmas Concert at the local school. Help serve the homeless at a Soup Kitchen. Visit shut-ins at a local nursing home. 'Buddy-up' with someone else who is alone or hurting at Christmas. Share gifts with a family in need. Invite a friend to go listen to the steam whistle carols in York at midnight on Christmas Eve. Enjoy a Christmas movie (*Join us on Monday 12/19 @ 6:30pm for supper and 7pm for the movie "Christmas Grace."*) Go caroling! (*We're going this Sunday afternoon!*) Read a Christmas themed book. (*Cathy reads her grandfather's old worn copy of "A Christmas Bride" by Grace Livingston Hill every Christmas.*) Sip hot cocoa. Put on the Christmas music. Many churches offer pageants, children's programs, concerts & cantatas ... invite a friend and enjoy! And of course ... worship! Enjoy our Advent worship including a Christmas sermon-in-drama, *"The Innkeeper's Open Door"* on 12/11 and our *"Sounds of the Season"* all music Sunday on 12/18. And don't forget Christmas Eve. (*Do you prefer 5pm @ Bermudian, or 7 & 10 pm at old Historic Altland Meeting House by candlelight & kerosene lamp? Some churches offer a "Blue Christmas" service, a hopeful gathering for those who are grieving. A Church in York offers a Jazz service on Christmas Eve.*) Give up the 'joy sucker' and add 'joy givers' to your celebration!

"I bring you Good News of great joy that will be for all people." Luke 2:10 NIV

"Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her King!"

From the beloved Christmas Carol by Isaac Watts

2. Give up things that don't honor Christ and strengthen the focus of your celebration on Christ. Let's face it ... spending too much ... eating too much ... drunkenness ... ignoring worship because of other activities ... these really may lead us to miss the point, and add stress! So take an honest survey of all your Christmas activities and ask of each thing: *"Does this distract from lifting up Christ? Is Christ honored in this?"* And if the answer is *"No,"* then it's time to *"give something up for Advent!"* How could this gathering or that activity be adjusted or adapted to more fully glorify the Christ of Christmas? Or, would the very act of eliminating it bring honor to my Lord? Read the Christmas Scripture as a family before opening presents. Have a

“Thankful” prayer after unwrapping presents. Sing some carols at a family gathering. Set some reasonable ‘no new debt’ spending goals. If you know a party is going to include too much drinking ... simply, respectfully decline the invitation. How about an Advent wreath for your home? There are Christian books for families that have a short story reading for each day of Advent.

The possibilities for enjoying this season and glorifying Jesus are nearly endless! When we do those things ... we are blessed and filled with happiness!

“When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” Matthew 2:10,11 NIV

“O come let us adore Him! O come let us adore Him! O come let us adore Him – Christ, the Lord!”

From the beloved Christmas Carol by John Francis Wade

Dear ones ... making changes in long standing traditions isn't always easy! But I pray the Lord will guide you to adapt, change, eliminate, enhance, cherish ... as you celebrate and know the Joy of His coming! Advent Blessings! Pastor Larry <><