

Don't give up. Give up.

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Yesterday was Ash Wednesday. We had bookend services, one at 8:00 a.m. in the chapel, the other at 7:00 p.m. The services were essentially the same: readings, sermon, imposition of ashes, confession, communion. Just the essentials.

One of the peculiar components of the Ash Wednesday service is something called "Invitation to Lent". I think it went by a different name in earlier incarnations of the liturgy. But, essentially, it's an exhortation to us to practice the disciplines of prayer, fasting and giving, self-examination and service during these forty days. It's an invitation to take up the struggle against sin, to gather all the weapons we can muster to fight temptation in our lives.

Don't give up.

So you said you would give up chocolate for Lent, and you're tempted all the time by the little pieces on your co-workers desk. So you get up every day and go to a job that you know isn't all that God intended you to do in life, and you're tempted to quit, even though you don't have another job lined up. So you are working to reduce gun violence in your community, but every time you think you have a chance, you have another setback, there is another school shooting. You wonder some days if your children are going to be all right when they grow up.

Don't give up. Don't give up doing good, even though it's hard, even impossible, and you fail a lot, and that's painful.

That's the message of Lent.

Except when I draw the crosses on people's foreheads, imperfectly, and say to them, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Remember that you are dust, you are mortal, you are finite, you are going to die someday, and you will leave some things undone. You will leave many things undone. You will have to let go of this life, let go of your children, let go of your accomplishments, let go of your hopes. Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return.

Give up. Let go of something you hold too tightly: a dream, a person, a possession.

Give up trying to impress people, wearing uncomfortable shoes, worrying about tomorrow. Give things away, like love, a word, your life. Serve, not expecting anything in return. Love without expecting a reward. Give up trying to save yourself. Be righteous but know that God doesn't love you because you are righteous.

Give up.

But, don't give up.

The message of Lent.

*Originally posted at [Faith in Community](#)*