

This week's Lesson is from Lay Chaplain Blake Singer.

I remember a meme surfacing on the internet towards the beginning of the pandemic that read, "This is the Lentiest Lent I've ever Lented." (click [here](#) to read the rest)

Of course, the creator of the meme was pointing out the absurdity of observing Lent during a season when we were forced to give up significantly more than social media, chocolate, or meat. But here we are a year later, after over 500,000 people have died from COVID in our country alone, and we've found ourselves in Lent once again.

Over the past few weeks, I've started noticing new Lenten pandemic memes, but the tone seems to have shifted. Of all the memes I've seen, I think the one that best captures the spirit of the present moment reads, "This year for Lent, I'm giving up." The almost winsome nature of "the Lentiest Lent" has been exchanged for a much darker sense of despair, hopelessness, and borderline nihilism. If meme culture is any indication of culture at large, what's the point of observing Lent when it seems we have nothing left to give up?

During a season when everything seems to be out of control, I'm struck by the irony that so much of Lent is about the issue of control. On Ash Wednesday, though not in person, we were reminded that life itself is outside of our control. We are but dust, and to dust we shall return. From that day to Easter, the journey of Lent becomes an opportunity to live into this reality through practices of giving up what little control we do have.

If this were all Lent were about, I might suggest that we should just give up Lent for Lent. After a year of physical separation and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, we don't need Lent to tell us that our lives are outside of our control. We've seen and felt that reality every day for a year. Can Lent really do anything more in 2021 than fuel the hopelessness felt by so many?

But I don't think we can afford to give up Lent in 2021, because there are two sides to the coin. Yes, Lent reminds us that our lives do not belong to us, but more importantly, Lent reminds us that our lives *do* belong to God. Our giving up of control is always directed towards cultivating the awareness that ultimate control of our lives and of the world has always rested with God, even when it may not feel like it. So, in some ways, observing Lent this year feels less like an exercise in hopelessness and more like an act of protest, an acknowledgement and even a proclamation that we don't determine the fate of our lives, but neither does any other power or principality of this world, not even a global pandemic