Were you ever the one who didn’t get the joke? Laughing but not sure why? Hoping no one will ask you to explain? Just not wanting to be embarrassed - that’s all.

Often Lent has been like that for me - I don’t get it. All the talk of denying yourself this or that - fasting - all the sorrow. Why should these forty days be any different than any other forty days? I ask myself. If not eating chocolate or cookies or not watching TV is good for forty days then surely it would be good every day of the year. If sorrow is good for a season, then why not for all seasons? And fasting? Well, full time fasting would have some serious consequences but surely fasting could be practiced at any time. Lent? I am afraid I don’t get it.

There are some things, though, that I can say with absolute certainty about Lent. First Lent is not a way to atone for my sins. The Hymn says it best: Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone, thou must save and thou alone.

Whatever you may do during Lent there is no merit won with God by your doing it. Christ has done all things necessary for your salvation. Your salvation is God’s gift to you, the full gift given in Christ’s death and resurrection - fully given to you in your baptism - to be received by faith. Have no doubt about that.

And if you are thinking about pretending a greater sorrow than you have or a greater sincerity forget about that. God knows your heart. Lent is not about trying to fool yourself or God.

So what is Lent about? Well I already told you that I don’t know. But I do want to offer some ways you might think about Lent if you want.

Lent is like checking the map. Think of Jesus' words - Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. So where is your treasure? In heaven - or on earth where it may end up rusty or moth eaten? What
are you living for - what gods rule your days and your weekends? Lent might be a time to read scripture and think about where you are and where you want to be - where God wants you to be.

Lent is a time to see things from God’s perspective. That is what Jesus was suggesting in the gospel. To do your fasting and praying and giving with God as your only audience - not even letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Forget about how you are looking to your friends and neighbors and pray trusting that God is hearing, and give to the poor trusting that Jesus is receiving, and fast trusting that God is seeing.

Lent may be a time to hear a word that redirects your life. Think of the Isaiah passage. Religion is about helping the suffering, sharing bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your home, covering the naked with clothing. Jesus will want you to know that what you do for the least of his brothers and sister you do for him.

Throughout the ages Lent has been a time to repent. Now that word is not so much a word about sorrow as it is a word meaning to turn.

I’d like to think Lent might be a time to turn away from habits that keep you from growing in faith, in hope, in love and to try out new habits that will bring growth. Talk with someone who knows you well. Ask - in what ways do you see me growing? Listen to the answer - turn to greater growing.

Most of all Lent is a time to rest in the hands of God. Paul said it in a most remarkable way. Be reconciled to God. I always think he got it backward that Lent should be in my trying to get God reconciled to me. But Paul says, you, be reconciled to God. Make peace with that God is and is doing in Jesus Christ. What you do, what you are is not what is important here but what God is doing in Jesus Christ. God is making a new creation out of you. God is saving you and making you righteous in Jesus Christ. Be reconciled to that. Rest yourself in the hands of God.
That is why most of all this Lent, we will tell the story of Jesus, for it is the story of how God is saving you from sin, from death from every enemy. God has you right there in his hand and he'll never let go. With that story to tell, who would ever want to hear about anything else.