



Reflection by Rev'd Anne Burden

First Sunday of Lent
Mark 1:9-15
18th February 2024

Ready or not - Lent has begun!!

And well done to those who gathered to worship at the Ash Wednesday service last evening as we marked the beginning of the season. It's good to travel together as we seek to grow in our journey of faith, and those who were unable to be in church for Ash Wednesday - for whatever reason - will find that there are other opportunities to join with others in the extra Lent activities. Look for a notice sheet for the details. We can do so much to encourage one another in faith as we face the challenges of life with its inevitable mixture of pleasure and pain.

For many people Lent is associated with giving something up. Back in my school days I remember Christian friends asking each other:- "What are you giving up for Lent?" Lent can be seen as an opportunity, perhaps, for kicking that unwanted habit, for going at last on that long-intended diet, or for denying oneself those unnecessary extra luxuries - luxuries which are beyond the wildest imaginings of most of the world's people. These acts of discipline certainly can have their place in the Christian life, but taken in isolation, they can give a very one sided view of Lent. If anything, I think, the season should be about taking something on; committing oneself, in the words of Jesus, to going the extra mile. That doesn't mean taking on work for work's sake - this still should be a considered decision. Rather, Lent should be about resolving to follow Christ more faithfully, and being more determined to give him our wholehearted discipleship. This might mean becoming more disciplined in prayer and worship, perhaps being more generous with our money, time or in practical service, maybe being more effective in Christian witness, or possibly the offering of previously unused gifts and talents. Whatever we do - and only we can decide what is right for us - our Lent discipline should be more than giving something up. Above all, Lent is about giving something back to the one who gave us his all - our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our task as we begin Lent is first to consider what Jesus has done for us, and then ask what we can do for him. As simple as that. These forty days, then, are our opportunity to respond - but not just for the season of Lent - rather as a new pattern for the rest of our Christian life.

A prayer for the beginning of Lent

Living God, forgive us that we slip too easily into a faith of negatives,
imagining that you are more concerned with what we shouldn't do
than with what we should.

Teach us that although there is a real place for self-denial,
there is also a place for affirming and celebrating life in all its fullness.

Help us, then, to use this season of Lent as a time to grow and learn,
to deepen our faith and strengthen our commitment;
above all to make more time for you,
so that you can work in our lives and enrich our experience of your love,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen