

A few words from the Vicar

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP Collect for Ash Wednesday)

It's February and Lent is almost upon us and time to consider which little pleasure I will give up for the duration. Let me see I'm tempted to give up all the paperwork that comes my way but, actually, to give it up would be a pleasure, so that doesn't count.

In any event, as recent visitors to my office will know, I am nowhere near up to date with my filing. So, in a sense, I can't really give up something I have been neglecting in part anyway! Furthermore, I rarely eat chocolate or sweets so I can't in all honesty give them up either. There is no sense in trying to fool God, is there?

So, cake it is then!

I like cake, positively enjoy it so giving it up for Lent will be something of a sacrifice for me, which makes it a good choice. What's more, following Christmas I could do with losing some weight. Even better! Two boxes ticked!

But, as I ponder upon the Collect for Ash Wednesday, giving up cake seems nowhere near enough.

The collect, which we pray each Sunday in Lent during our BCP services, begins by reminding us that God is almighty and everlasting and that he loves us. We are not deserving of his love. Rather God loves us because it is his nature to do so. He loves us because he does.

Indeed the collect reminds us starkly of the need for penitence and contrition as we stand before God lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness. But we do so in the context of God's overwhelming love for us and, knowing how weak willed we can be at times, we ask God to help us by creating new and contrite hearts within us.

In the circumstances it would seem wrong to presume upon God's mercy. Nonetheless, his mercy is a given if we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

For me, this collect neatly sums up what Lent is about. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, we approach almighty God in contrition and wretchedness to acknowledge our sins. Yet, as we do so there is a sense of overwhelming joy because God loves us and has not written us off. Indeed, no matter who we are or what we've done, God loves us and forgives us; thus we are freed from the burden of guilt and can look forward to an eternity in his love.

Lent is a time for spiritual growth as we both get real about ourselves and come to appreciate more God's overwhelming love for us.

So, is it enough just to give up cake or biscuits or chocolate in Lent? If we genuinely give up a pleasure for the duration, it is a start but, in keeping with the spirit of the season, we really ought to go further.

This Lent I plan to spend more time in prayer and have a hit list of theology books I plan to read.

What about you? How do you plan to grow spiritually during Lent?

Every Blessing

Dave