

A few words from the Vicar

'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'
(Matthew 6:16-18, NRSV)

It is March and Lent is upon us!

So, what can I say about Lent that is fresh, different from my previous newsletters? Not a lot, really!

Lent is Lent. The Church calendar does not change in its essentials year on year. That is a good thing. There is a familiar pattern to the Church year that stretches back over the centuries. An annual cycle of celebration laid over our weekly and monthly pattern of worship.

Good Friday and Easter are obvious examples. Then again, strictly speaking, it is Good Friday and Easter every single day of the year. Jesus' death and resurrection are always with us, as are the joyful consequences of these pivotal events in history. Indeed, we specifically remember these events each Sunday when we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

But, we also celebrate the special events of Jesus' life and the history of the Church annually on specific days, to remind us of the whole picture. So, in addition to Good Friday and Easter, we have Christmas, Epiphany, Candlemas, Palm Sunday, Ascension, Pentecost, Lady Day, Advent, etc.

Lent, too, is part of this annual pattern of celebration, yet calling it a celebration does not quite ring true. Flowers are banned from Church and our services take on a sombre note; we omit the Gloria and we do not say or sing 'Alleluia'. Added to which,

as a spiritual discipline, we are encouraged to fast by giving up something we enjoy (chocolate, biscuits, cakes, beer etc.).

And, the season begins with the Ash Wednesday Communion service, which is deliberately sombre and during which I exhort everyone to “... *[observe] a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy word.*” We come before God as penitents, and as such, receive the imposition of ashes (an outward sign of penitence).

Yet, Lent is a season of celebration!

Sure, during Lent especially we come before Jesus as penitents, in the knowledge that he is our judge. Yet, we also stand before him in the knowledge that we are Easter people. On the cross Jesus took the penalty for all our sins upon himself and through his resurrection conquered death so that we might have life in abundance and for an eternity.

So yes, Lent is sombre but it is also a joyful celebration. Therefore, be joyful in your Lenten fast and in your Lenten devotions. Let our rightful penitence be tinged with joy as you recall Jesus’ overwhelming love for you and what he achieved for you on that first Easter.

Every Blessing

Dave