

A few words from the Vicar

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. (Joel 2:12-13)

Well, it's Ash Wednesday on 6th March. So, what are you giving up for Lent?

As for me, well, with my blood sugar up slightly, Lent couldn't come too soon! So, I'll be giving up biscuits **and** cakes, **and** going to the gym more often. Jobs a good 'un. Beat that for Lenten observance!

Anybody spot what's wrong with what I have just written?

Well, obviously, (and a big well done to those who spotted it) giving up something for Lent is meant to be a spiritual discipline, a mini-fast when we give up one (or a few) of life's luxuries for the duration.

Lent is a time for spiritual spring cleaning, a time for self-examination and reflecting upon our walk with Jesus. Fasting is meant to be a spiritual discipline, an outward sign of repentance. Giving something up for Lent helps us to appreciate what we have, to appreciate that God is the source of all we have and, from there, to appreciate that our material wellbeing is the tip of an iceberg. God is much more generous than that for, through Jesus, we receive His love and forgiveness.

So, if we treat Lent as an aid to slimming or as an excuse to improve our diet temporarily, then we miss the point of it.

As it happens, I enjoy going to the gym, so going more often is a treat rather than a sacrifice. For me, therefore, getting some exercise does not count towards the Lenten mini-fast.

As for biscuits, I can take them or leave them, but I should eat less of them. I am not diabetic, but it is not good for me to eat too many, so abstaining will do me good (and reduce my blood sugar). For me, giving up biscuits is less about sacrifice and more to do with healthy living. So, in that sense, for me, giving up biscuits doesn't count either.

But, for me, cake is a treat (just as biscuits might be a treat for you) so, for me, giving up cake for Lent will be a sacrifice, will be a spiritual discipline.

That's the mini-fast aspect of Lent dealt with, but what about self-examination and reflection? Well, as always during Lent, I will spend more time in prayer and catch up on some theological reading. The pile of books and journals I would like to read never seems to get any smaller, and Lent is a good time to make inroads into it.

That's me sorted. What about you?

Well, you could make a start by coming to church on Ash Wednesday. We have two communion services on that day; Mid-Week Praise at 6.15pm, and the traditional service at 7.30pm during which there will be a time of self-examination and repentance. At both services, as an act of penitence, there will be the opportunity to receive the imposition of ashes.

Given the popularity and continued growth of Mid-Week Praise, I plan to have an abundant supply of ash. There will be more than enough ash to go around.

Then, make a point of coming along to our Lenten Devotionals on Tuesday evenings. See the Diary for details.

Have a holy Lent!

Dave