

A few words from the Vicar

*Now is the healing time decreed
For sins of heart and word and deed,
when we in humble fear record
the wrong that we have done the Lord.*
(Latin, before 12th Century)

What are you giving up for Lent?

Why do I ask? Well, February is upon us and, before you know it, it will be Ash Wednesday (13th February) when we shall begin observing the season of Lent.

In some ways Lent has become little more than an aid to slimming; a detox-lite set between the over-indulgence of Christmas and the coming of Spring when we temporarily give up biscuits, cakes, sweets (or even, heaven forbid, booze). This is a faint echo of the true nature of the season.

For Lent is meant to be a time for self-examination, penitence, self-denial, study, charitable giving and preparation for Easter. Although a step in the right direction, a token sacrifice, a token 'giving something up for Lent', doesn't really do justice to the season!

That's not to say that I'm expecting everyone to be miserable in church. I won't be, so why should you? Indeed, as far as I'm concerned 'miserable' and 'church' are mutually exclusive!

Sure our church will be devoid of flowers, we won't be singing the Gloria and our Bible readings towards the end of the season have a dark feel to them as we anticipate Christ's suffering and death. But none of that is about being miserable. Rather these things help us to reflect soberly upon our sinfulness in the knowledge that God loves us and, if we abide in Christ, He has forgiven us.

So, for me Lent carries within it an overwhelming feeling of joy. Yes, of course, my joy is tinged with feelings of penitence because Jesus suffered and died for my sin. But I am joyful for exactly the same reason. I am overjoyed because Jesus suffered and paid the penalty for my sin. And, because He did so, I can live life to the full both now and for eternity without being burdened with feelings of guilt and shame for the past.

I can live my life safe in the knowledge that nothing in my past, present or future can ever separate me from God's eternal love for me. And the same goes for everyone else at the moment they choose to follow Jesus. Regardless of their lifestyle or what lies in their past, Jesus rejects no one. All are loved and all are welcome.

Lent inevitably points us towards Easter when we joyfully celebrate Christ's conquest of death in the knowledge that we too will share in His resurrection.

So, by all means give something up for Lent but why not use the season as an opportunity for spiritual growth; take something on as well (or instead). For example, you could:



Detail from 'Battle between Carnival and Lent' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1559

- Attend worship more often. Come to our Ash Wednesday Communion (with imposition of ashes), come to one of our mid-week Communion services and come to a service you wouldn't normally attend (e.g. experience the delights of Evensong).
- Attend our Lenten devotionals (Tuesday evenings from 19th February at 7.30pm).
- Sign up for our Lent course '*Glimpses of God - Hope for today's world*'. We begin 7.30pm Thursday 21st February at the Vicarage. Please let me know if you wish to take part.
- Spend longer in prayer and read your Bible every day. Anne Rule (0161 763 3369) can provide daily Bible study notes at reasonable cost. Why not give her a call?
- Read a couple of spiritual books.

Or any combination of the above!

As for me, during Lent I plan to make headway with the pile of theological books currently lying unread on my desk that are just begging me to read them.

Have a joyful Lent!

Every Blessing

Dave