

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)*



Ash Wednesday (9th March) marks the beginning of Lent. This is the time of year when many Christians exercise a modicum of self-denial by giving up something we like, such as sugar, biscuits, chocolate, fags or booze.

Well, I think it'll be biscuits for me this year! What are you planning to give up?

And of course, there is nothing wrong with a bit of self-discipline and self-denial is there and there's nothing wrong with shedding a few pounds into the bargain either!

But Lent is about much more than giving up biscuits for a few weeks or taking our tea without sugar. Lent is a time for preparing ourselves spiritually for our Easter walk with Jesus; a walk that takes us through His betrayal, suffering, and crucifixion and then onward to celebrate His resurrection on that first Easter. Lent is a season of self-denial, prayer and penitence; a time for reminding ourselves that Jesus suffered and died to pay the eternal penalty for our sins.

All this brings a rather sombre air to Lent which is reinforced by the absence of flowers and the use purple hangings (a colour often used at funerals) in Church and the omission of the *Gloria* during worship. Then, as Holy Week approaches the atmosphere of the season darkens as our Bible readings begin to anticipate the story of Jesus' suffering and death.

But actually none of this is about making ourselves feel guilty or miserable. As we ponder our own sin and the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are preparing ourselves for the overwhelming joy of Easter. So for me, the underlying emotion of Lent is one of joy rather than remorse. Jesus died for me and, with my sins forgiven, I know I have an eternal future ahead of me.

For me Lent is also an important opportunity for recharging my spiritual batteries; for setting time aside to read some of those unread theological books piling up in my study and for doing something different spiritually.

So, how can we at Christ Church help you recharge your spiritual batteries during Lent?

Well, if you want to try something a little different, we will be holding a series of simple devotional gatherings in the Church and Community Hall at 7.30pm on Tuesday evenings throughout Lent. Some of these coincide with our Mothers' Union branch evening but you don't need to be a member to take part.

Then on Thursday evenings (7.30pm) we are running a Lenten study course at the Vicarage on the theme of vocations. There is still room if you want to come along.

But we begin Lent with two Ash Wednesday services of Holy Communion (at 9.30am and 7.30pm). Ashes are an ancient sign of penitence and at both services there will be the opportunity for those that want it to be marked in ash with the sign of the cross. So, why not come along and be ashed?

Have a good Lent!

Every Blessing

Dave