

Reflection, Ash Wednesday,

1st and 2nd March, 2022 – Quairading, Brookton, York, and Beverley

Readings: Joel 2:1,2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Hymns: Forty Days and Forty Nights, Love Divine, all Loves excelling, Lead us Heavenly Father, lead us

Tonight, as we begin our Lenten journey; let it be one in which we listen to our Lord Jesus Christ through reflection, repentance, faith and “taking stock” of whom we are, and where we are in terms of our relationship with him – both as individuals and as a community of faith. To that end we have an opportunity to practise three great streams of the Christian life that Jesus revealed in our Gospel reading. There, Jesus speaks of giving, praying, and fasting.

Since the church began, Christians in monasteries, homes and workplaces have practiced these three disciplines of faith in Jesus. Many of you may have memories of these things in your families because such things are a strong part of our heritage as Anglicans. Many of us might have stories to tell about these three disciplines of faithful living.

They are concerned with the heart. All three are concerned about not giving too much of ourselves to “things” and “self” but rather, the things of God and our life in God – “treasures in heaven”, as St Mathew calls them.

Let us, this Lent, dare to commit ourselves to active listening to Jesus, and practise the disciplines of giving, praying, and fasting – all in the posture of listening to his Word for us now – both as an individual child of God called to fulfil our many stations in life (spouse, parent, colleague, friend, public servant, farmer, business owner, worker, student etc) and as a member of this congregation?

First, let us look at the discipline of giving: Jesus speaks of giving to others, especially those in need, without any great show for others to see – but only for our Father in heaven to see. Giving might be giving of money, giving of time, giving of

our attention and focus for someone or something to do with furthering God's kingdom where we work or live.

We could as an act of listening to and serving the Lord, give more time to a friend in need each week of Lent? Could we give more generously to the mission of the congregation and wider church in Lent? Could we give more help or food or goods to a person or community or family through Lent? Could we take on a small project as members of our congregation which is an act of active listening to God and giving to those in need in Lent?

Secondly, let us consider the discipline of praying: could we engage in prayer with Jesus every day in Lent in private, morning, noon, or night? Could we deliberately give five minutes of our day to praying for those we love by name and for anything that comes to us from our Lenten worship or the friendship groups of which we are part? Is it much to do to take five minutes to talk to the Lord and seek his help and direction for ourselves and for this church community?

You could decide to make a commitment to set aside five minutes at midday – wherever we are – to either pray to Lord's Prayer or speak to the Lord about things – and again, with no great show – only so that He knows.

Thirdly, let us consider the discipline of fasting. There is something about our human makeup that links our listening to fasting - from taking in food. Somehow, denying our very basic needs (food and drink) for some period, with the intention to listen to the Lord and give this act of denial to him in faith and love, heightens our ability to hear.

Fasting does not have to be onerous. We can fast of one thing for forty days. We can fast for one meal per week, or per day. We can leave out one thing that we like – not to beat ourselves up or try and win God's favour. We already have his favour. We are his free loved children. We don't fast to gain God's favour. We fast to listen to him in a clearer way. We fast to follow Jesus' example in faith.

If we do so these things or some of them, then our Lent might be about “Taking Stock” of ourselves and how we are with the Lord at this time. For we know:

- The Lord is calling us to give – anything from random acts of giving and kindness, to giving money, to giving time, to giving our skills.
- The Lord is calling us to pray – Midday for five mins and then other times as we can fit them in – for ourselves, for others, our church, God’s leading, the poor we know.
- The Lord is calling us to fast – Wednesday is fasting day – a meal, a loved thing, all day, giving up something for Him – not to earn anything but to seek and hear and receive good things from him.

In all of this we should be listening to Him. In hearing his Word, you might follow a daily schedule of short readings of his Word to make your own every day. You could read his Word most days – maybe combine it with a midday prayer or at some other time of the day. Perhaps you could find a chair in a corner somewhere and go there for a couple of minutes to read the text.

Friends, may I invite you to begin these forty days with hope – hope in Jesus and his love on display as we re-tell the story of his walk down the way of suffering. Begin with hope in God’s Word – he will speak as we pay attention in these three streams of the Christian life.

Listen by giving, praying, and fasting. He will help us “take stock” of whom we are and where we are going, and we will get to that great Easter Day and be full of joy in a new way!

May you have a blessed Lent listening to the voice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.