

## *Lent and Holy Week 2018- some thoughts and opportunities*

We have often been told in the last year or so that we are now in a 'post-fact era'; I'm sure many of us understand why this might be. On some days it feels like there's no news that can't be spun, no question that can't be evaded, no promise that can't later be avoided. Whether the issue is the murder of innocent civilians in a war zone or widespread abuse of those who are vulnerable by those who are powerful, we're learning that for many, turning a blind eye to inconvenient truths is something of an art form.

But so what? This is just how things are isn't it?

No.

We are standing on the edge of the most important season of the Church's year. The whole Christian faith and the living of the Christian life is both summed up and spread before us in the 40 days of Lent, in Holy Week and in the celebration of Easter.

As Christians we believe that this season has just as much to say about the world as we find it today as the world in which Jesus lived. We believe that everything in the universe revolves around 'the Paschal Mystery', the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While everything else might be up for grabs, it is in the *facts* of Jesus' death and resurrection – more certainly testified to than almost anything else in the ancient world – that we can put our trust and anchor ourselves.

So how do we anchor ourselves? First, by preparing during Lent. Lent is not an amble through one resolution or another, but is preparation for Holy Week, a week that should test our strength as Jesus was tested. We are all different, and we will each find some things more helpful than others. That's why there are lots of suggestions to try at the end of this sheet. Many Christians find a short service called 'Stations of the Cross' to be helpful in preparing them during Lent. In this service made of Bible readings with some verses from hymns we follow Jesus on that journey he took from Jerusalem to Golgotha, carrying his cross.

Second, by sharing in Holy Week: the journey from the acclamation of Palm Sunday, through the gifts of Maundy Thursday and the condemnation and death of Good Friday to the resurrection of Easter Night. This will be a form of anchoring as we are immersed in and shaped by these events. God's grace means that we are not just 'doing some services' but we are in a real sense sharing in the events as if they were happening now.

Third, by acknowledging the power of Easter. The fact that death has finally been defeated, that evil is only ever victorious for a time and – perhaps for our generation most important of all – that the universe evolved *for this purpose* means that we need not be afraid. When Mother Julian of Norwich said that ‘all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well’ she was not uttering random cheery thoughts to get us through a damp and grey season but speaking after terrible sufferings and from a hard-won conviction of God’s love and purpose. Similarly, in anchoring our lives in the death and resurrection of Jesus we are being made part of a still point amid the turning of the world that takes seriously and folds into itself the reality of death. There is *optimism* based on closing your eyes and sticking your fingers in your ears: this is not Christianity. There is, however, also *hope*, based on facing the horror, not without fear but without turning back, knowing that even in situations of Godforsakenness there is one with you who has known Godforsakenness too: Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

May Lent, Holy Week and Easter be a wonderful, profound and challenging time for us all and may we so share in it that it becomes for us that safe anchor and truthful fact with which we can face all that the world throws at us and do so with grace and love.

### *Suggestions for keeping Lent*

- Set aside half an hour each day for meditation, prayer and bible reading.
- Attend an extra service during Lent, or the Monday evening prayer group.
- Attend the Ecumenical Lent discussion groups - Tuesday evenings 7.00pm at St Peter’s, starting 20th February:  
“WHEN I SURVEY... Christ’s cross and ours”  
An exploration of themes related to how Christ’s crucifixion impacts on our lives today, with Bible study and discussion.
- Give something up and give the proceeds to WaterAid or a charity of your choice. The PCC has adopted WaterAid as our Lenten charity, and you are invited to fill a Jar for Change and hand it in at Easter.
- Join in praying the “Stations of the Cross” in St John’s on Sunday’s at 4 pm: 18<sup>th</sup> & 25th February, 4th, 11th & 18th March
- Read a Lent book (ask the clergy if you want a suggestion)

- Attend Bishop Paul's Lent talks at St Hilda's, South Shields on Sunday evenings at 6.30pm
- *Tuesday 13th February: Praying with your Bus Pass*  
3 sessions exploring how faith and our relationship with God may change and develop as we grow older, led by **Bishop Mark** at St Antony's Priory, Durham. Booking details on the Priory's website. The day begins with prayer at 12.30 followed by lunch (optional). Full session 1.30 -3.30 pm. Use public transport and get a reduction on the price of the day (then February 27th and March 13th same format). Suggested donation £12 with lunch, £6 without.
- Live Lent Generously by doing a daily act of generosity, or seeking out ways of attending to those in need.  
eg [40acts.org.uk](http://40acts.org.uk)
- Reflect on your own Christian life and our part in God's mission. Where is God leading you? Where is God leading us?
- Keep free the time in Holy Week to attend the special services:

*The clergy are happy to help you plan for any of the above. Select what will work well for you – we can't all do everything, but we can all take on something!*

*Can't decide what is for you? Slowly read each option, then in prayer ask God to help you decide and keep silent for 10 minutes. See what feels right afterwards and do it!*