

The 1st letter of Peter explains all this to us again ~ Christ reveals the Father's love to us so that we can be brought back to God. "Put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit " (v.18b) and offering salvation, through Baptism in the Spirit and our symbolically 'pledging a clear conscience' with God.

Humanly it is that clear conscience that gets grubby in our everyday life when worldly things crowd out our time with God and we find ourselves taking Him for granted and making demands of Him without giving anything back to Him in response to His love for us.

Lent is a time to set the record straight again ~ to check the accounts and balance the books of our lives and ensure that our faith is in the black ~ to give back to God to enable us to receive from Him and then give to others; not in a boastful or load way but discretely and humbly ~ trusting that our efforts will enable other to see God's Love.

So review what you have chosen to do for Lent and ask yourself how does it reveal God's love to others, does it put my needs aside or is it just to make me feel good? Have I boasted about what I am going to do or will everyone know how hard I am finding it as the 40 days go on? If you are doing something for the feel good factor or for your own benefit then please stop and think again. Ask the Spirit to guide what you should do and be obedient to that and use Lent to come closer to the God that Loves you so much that He has given you His Son. Amen

Ministry Musings

1st Sunday of Lent

As we enter the season of Lent it would seem that the Spirit is leading us to learn more about what it means to give Jesus Supremacy in our lives 24/7!

What does that look like and feel like as we go about our lives?

How does it show in our relationships with one another and how we treat ourselves?

How does our worship develop our relationship with God and encourage our support of each other?

Faith is not private ~coming to church is as much about what we contribute as it is about what we receive! ~If we opt out of styles of worship because they 'don't do anything for us' then we damage the body of Christ which we are part of at Immanuel & St. Andrew and we are missed! That does not mean we have to put up with things we find a hinderance but it does give us the right to share why they hinder our relationship with God and seek ways of changing them.

Our MAP, as it develops, along with the rest of the Diocesan input we are being offered as a 'pioneer project parish' will help us move from the rut we find ourselves in to being a vibrant witness to Christ in this place. As we enter this period it will stimulate and challenge and we won't like everything suggested or that we experience. But these are exciting times and it is good they are starting as we enter Lent. A time to review what God wants in our lives.

Today we hear in Genesis of the Rainbow give by God as a Covenant of His desire for us to be in a loving relationship with Him. 1 Peter 3 tells us that the water of baptism saves not through cleansing our bodies but through the pledge of a clear conscience toward God ~ just as was given to Noah's family through the flood so that as our Gospel commends in its closing verse we can recognise that "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" and develop our "knowing Jesus ~ making Him known".

Genesis 9:8-17 OT page 7
1 Peter 3:18-end NT page 232
Mark 1:9-15 NT page 33

What does Lent mean for you?

For some it means making a sacrifice by giving up something ~ chocolate, wine, social media, TV etc or taking something on ~ like going to the gym, getting the bicycle out again, having a spring clean, ~ usually with an ulterior motive for self improvement ~ losing weight, making time for other things in our lives that we have neglected. All honourable in their own way but not quite why the church observes lent!

For some it will be to take up some Holy reading, to learn more about our faith and God's love for us and to rearrange the diary to allow us to come to church to take time to reflect other than on a Sunday. Those things are honourable too but not quite all that God intends or desires!

If you were able to attend an Ash Wednesday Service, (not easy in worldly terms this year as it fell in half term, on Valentines Day and on one of the wettest nights so far in 2018!) you would have been reminded that ***Lent is a time to come closer to God, through self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting and self-denial and, by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.***

The scripture readings reminded us that there are right ways to fast and pray and that there should be an outcome to our self-examination and self-denial. We should never fast or pray in a 'look at me aren't I good' sort of way or indeed with a 'Look at me I am doing this for God ~ you should do it this way too' Attitude ~ both of which look for praise and thus a reward in the here and now and God says if you get your reward now you won't receive reward from Him! God is not inclined to respond to the boastful or self indulgent!

Instead Scripture tells us that our fasting and prayer should be productive leading to us setting the oppressed free; sharing our

food with the hungry; providing the wanderer/refugee with shelter; clothing those without clothing and putting our own needs and desires aside.

If we are productive in any of these ways or similar then our light will break forth ~ others will see God in us and we will experience healing for the damage of straying from God's purpose in our lives and not giving our relationship with Him time to grow.

You can see how today we arrive at giving things up or taking things on but have lost sight of the reasons why we are doing so!

So how do we go about following the Scriptural way?

We discover through God's Word that He will always guide and encourage us to get it right with Him. Noah obeyed God when the world and most of God's people were not doing so. After the flood God promised never to be that angry with His people again and to find other ways to bring them back to Him ~ he made a covenant sealing that promise and provided a rainbow to remind everyone that His way would be love.

Ultimately that Love is given to you and me in Jesus Christ ~ fully God and fully human ~ which we call incarnate ~ Jesus, knew human frailty and was able to resist it. Today our Gospel tell us that after being baptised by John and spending forty days in solitude ~ walking with God His Father ~ yet vulnerable to temptation ~ He relied on Scripture to sustain Him and deepen His trust in God ~ and resisted all that tempted Him ~ simple and real things like hunger to the point of feeling famished ~ allowing for wild thoughts of power and grandeur ~ about kingship but not the Kingship of God's Son. Jesus could recognise all of the temptations for what they were and not succumb to them. Jesus returned to civilisation and when John was imprisoned Jesus began His ministry, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus had to share the Father's love.