

## Ministry Musings (5<sup>th</sup> March 2017)

closeness ~ to learn and practice ways of ensuring that we do not ignore God's love for us or deny Him but that we share His love and communicate with Him in some way each day. God shows us through Jesus earthly life that walking close to God is not easy ~ even when you are God incarnate! Jesus, because of His humanity knew what temptation was and showed that temptation can be resisted.

Jesus was tempted by hunger and the opportunity to break fast and eat ~ He knew that he could command stones and they would become bread ~ but He knew that you and I could not so he resisted and trusted that faith in God would enable Him to come to the end of the fast and eat from normal produce ~ He did not need to fill His stomach to feel full and that we need to know that too! He trusted God's Word that provision would be made through more than food.

Jesus was tempted by knowledge and the opportunity to prove to Himself that all things were possible for Him because of who He is! Again he knew that you and I do not have those powers and again that God's Word says do not put the Lord your God to the test. God may well save you if you are in an accidental situation but not one of your own making ~ just to see if He will keep His Word!

Jesus was tempted by power and materialism with the opportunity to rule for His own wealth ~ to put material things before God's creation by worshipping all that distances God from us ~ but He knew that God's children were already inclined to worship material things rather than God and that it is God's desire we worship Him to find wholeness and fulfilment. Again Jesus stands by the Truth in God's Word and not its misinterpretation ~ He rebukes the temptation/Satan by quoting

“Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only” Deut. 6:13

If you have decided to give something up for Lent it should be for the purpose of allowing you to take something on that brings you closer to God and benefits His creation ~ not primarily yourself!

Your fast ~ whatever it is ~ should heighten your awareness of your dependence on God's love and provision. It should also be private ~ not a boasting or attention seeking activity ~ so that it is about what God does for and through you NOT what you are doing for God ~ which He may not have asked you to do at all! Your only aim is to

**Know Jesus and make Him known**

Did you have pancakes last Tuesday?

Did you take part in the Imposition of Ashes last Wednesday?

If you said yes to pancakes and no to coming to worship

~ consider why ?

~ what attracted you to one and not the other ?

~ why did you make the effort to shop for ingredients but not to seek to meet with God?

Both, together, are rituals of the church to enable God's children to begin Lent, yet God's children select the celebration but avoid the contrition! You will not be the only one who made those choices ~ but you do need to let the Spirit show you why those choices are so natural and yet so damaging to your pilgrimage of faith! When you enjoyed your pancakes did you actually thank God for them or just indulge? ~ saying Grace swings in and out of fashion ~ but it should not be an accessory, an add on, but a integral part of every meal!

Now don't think I am nagging ~ just challenging! If you are reading Dethroning Mammon you will know that the first chapter deals with our inbuilt tendency to value what we see. Valuing what we see can be really positive once we have learnt to see clearly ~ that means seeing through God's eyes, recognising what we look for and knowing it when we see it. Learning to see things for their true value ~ not for the inflated (or even deflated) value the world gives to them. ~

Our readings today tell us

~ that God gave us creation to take care of but placed a temptation in that responsibility (before Adam could recognise what temptation was!) and warned of its destructive nature.

~ that God has given us Jesus to enable us to see clearly again and use our freedom of choice appropriately.

~ that Jesus is our example having experienced the challenges of seeing clearly and resisting temptation.

*‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ Matt. 4:10b*

So back to pancakes ~ well food generally ~ this week “take on” the habit saying Grace each mealtime ~ seeing God's provision for you, not taking it for granted but giving thanks for it ~

**knowing Jesus ~ making Him known !**

Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7      OT page    2  
Romans 5:12–19            NT page 151  
Matthew 4:1–11            NT page    3

On Wednesday I asked those of you here if you had made pancakes the day before and made them for the right reason ~ to symbolically give thanks for God's provision for you and show that you trust God to provide even when you are not sure where the next meal might come from. Being shriven is also about clearing out all the excess that distracts us from walking closely with God ~ so we use up the rich ingredients in a feast. The world calls this Pancake Day but the Church calls it Shrove Tuesday and it is always the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday ~ the day where we show we are truly ready to be shriven ~ to make our confession to God, to be given or take on a task that is designed to remind us that God is at the centre of our lives and to know we are forgiven for denying that in any way. Those who are marked with ash, created from last year's Palm crosses, acknowledge how fickle we can be ~ rejoicing and greeting Jesus as he enters Jerusalem and faces trial, death and resurrection, but are not so eager or willing to stand with Him in the suffering and pain ~ expecting to benefit from His love and forgiveness, taking it for granted and doing little or nothing in response and return for it. We know we do not have to earn His love but that does not mean we should not show our gratitude in everything we do!

And so Lent begins and we have a series of readings over the 46 days (40 if we discount the Sundays when we can relax from whatever task we are given and celebrate God's love), Today we reflect on what happens if we stray from God's teaching. God does not make demands of us often and when He does it is to reveal to us His desire for our wholeness, our wellbeing.

When God created Adam and placed him in the garden of Eden, He provided all that Adam would require so long as he took care of the garden and worked the land to enable the produce to grow. He had one instruction ~ not to do any more than admire the tree of knowledge of good and evil ~ he was to leave that tree, in the centre of the garden alone and not eat its fruit. God tells him that if he does eat the fruit he will surely die!

The stage is set ~ the tree is beautiful and it can't be ignored as it is

the centre-piece in the garden ~ God has effectively set up the first temptation. We have all watched a child told not to touch something get so curious that it becomes impossible for them to resist ~ and if they have someone egging them on it is even harder. We probably know from our own experience the effect of being told not to do something and how we immediately want to do that thing. We read in a Service that 'silence is kept' and we want to cough or sneeze or we think of an urgent comment we really want to make to our neighbour! Or we have to have a full bladder for an examination and the desire to go to the cloakroom distracts us from worrying about the procedure we are facing! Or we are told to fast before a blood test and we are desperate to eat!

Adam and Eve faced this temptation in the garden ~ the one thing they were not to do became the overpowering desire to do it and see!

Add into that a small voice persuading them that they will be alright and the distraction is bound to be too much! The serpent removes from the instruction the threat of death ~ and puts in its place the idea that they will know everything there is to know ~ they will be like God and Eve gives in shortly followed by Adam.

They did not die ~ not in literal terms ~ but what God meant by death was the irreversible change in their situation ~ they knew and understood things that they did not need to know ~ that God knew would be too much for them to deal with ~ innocence died that day in the garden and from then on they had to take responsibility for their actions and learn what obedience really means and develop the discipline required to be obedient. God tried in many ways to enable and encourage that natural obedience in His children but ultimately knew that we would need a gift of absolute love and grace to bring us anywhere near being like Adam and Eve before they ate of the forbidden fruit. ~ So He made that sacrifice and gave us His Son (His incarnate self) to fill the gap if we would allow that to happen ~ to enable a direct relationship with Him to be restored and, when the Son died and rose again ~ God made provision that we would never need to be alone again by giving us the presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit. The only requirement made of us is that we accept His gift ~ He will never force it on us.

Lent is the time when we deliberately focus on how to come closer to God again and hopefully develop the discipline to stay within that