

## St Brandon's 26 Feb 23 Lent 1

**Ps 32; Romans 5: 12-19; Matthew 4: 1-11**

### Joining the Journey

Here we are in Lent- which takes its name from the lengthening days as Spring approaches: isn't it lovely to see this?

Today we consider our Lenten journey, how this season challenges us to be intentional in the way we live, to be focused and disciplined, to appreciate God's blessings, and as Psalm 90 puts it: *'Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.'*

I say Lenten Journey, but in fact there 3 interconnected journeys today, the first two I'll mention two briefly and the third in greater detail. Firstly, our **spiritual journey**

On Ash Wednesday we considered the 'Long Way Home' which the Prodigal son took back to his father, in Jesus' memorable story, and how this speaks to us about Repentance, Receiving God's Love and our Rebirth as God's children.

That's the heart of our spiritual journey all year, but especially in Lent as we travel toward Christ's' passion, death and resurrection, which have opened the way for us to journey back to God. Our **spiritual journey.**

Secondly, our **journey of daily life.**

Through these 40 days in 2023, we hold before us the forty days Jesus spent in the desert, being tempted by the devil. The victories he won there paved the way for his public ministry, living as God among us, demonstrating God's priorities, power and compassion. But, had Jesus given in to any of the temptations, his ministry on earth would have failed. That threefold attempt by Satan strikes at the heart of Jesus' relationship with his Father, his core identity.

Immediately before, at his baptism, Jesus heard his Father's voice: 'This is my beloved Son'.

Satan turns that affirmation into accusation: ***If you are the Son of God....*** We know that voice, don't we...

*'Call yourself a Christian and you behave like that?'*

*'Surely you don't believe God loves **you**?'*

Three times Jesus is tempted to seek physical comfort, do flashy stunts, claim earthly

status and celebrity, rather than to trust the truth of who he is, to rely solely on God.

The same temptations are all around us today- in our wasteful food industry, our social media obsessions, our slanderous, truth bending power structures, to name but a few..

Refuting each accusation, Jesus quotes Scripture, a wellspring of wisdom. Studying and living Scripture, the word of God, is vital for us too, as today's Psalm said *'I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye.*

*Be not like horse and mule which have no understanding;*

Lets actively seek God's way in our daily lives, make reading and meditating on the Bible part of our pattern this Lent, to combat the other voices, to hear God for ourselves.

You could read a Lent Book (there's one spare copy at the back of *Telling the Easter Story* and also some other Lent books which are free to borrow) , you could follow the Church of England daily readings *Dust and Glory* – easily accessible on your phone – whatever you choose, make that a priority in these forty days.

And of course you could join one of our Lent Groups- which brings me to the third Lenten Journey I want to consider, the **Journey Together**, on Sundays and through the week. We've chosen this year to use the Pilgrim Course about *The Eucharist* ( hold up booklet), which was written just before the pandemic. We use it now with the lived experience of not being able to celebrate the Eucharist together and therefore, with fresh insights into its significance.

It's almost three years since the first lockdown, when I locked the church door, not knowing how long it would last...

Alison, Sabine and I led Eucharists from our homes, encouraging you to 'feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving'. For some of you watching this, that invitation still speaks.

Back in 2020, being the only person who ate and drank was painful for me: my understanding of the Eucharist was rooted in sharing a *Common* meal, holy 'communion'. Once I was back in the building, allowed to celebrate Communion here once more, you may remember the view you saw in those Zoom days, of the church behind me. I stood at the chancel altar, facing East, not the central altar around which we gather today. Some weeks Alison presided in the castle chapel, also facing east.

Without God's people present, I felt unable to use this table, though it was always possible: I couldn't do it until you all came back, until we were together.

I was reminded then of attending 8am Communion with my mother as a youth, the priest facing east, everything at a distance. For me there was awe and mystery but also alienation in this, and little sense of Communion, which may be why I sought a different style of worship at university, though still Anglican!

Those pandemic days did however give me insights, into the loss which was felt here after the fire, and into the pain of the Eucharist, the separation which Christ suffered for us, as his body was broken and his blood shed, in order that we could be reunited with God, *our* alienation ended. I think I began to understand more of the *cost* of the cross and therefore the immense *value* of the holy gifts we share. I'm thankful for that.

I'm thankful too to the Worship Team for reviewing our online and hybrid services, and helping to discern that we are now in a different place and need to refresh our patterns of worship.

So we've drafted updated services to use in Holy Week and at Easter, not vastly different but combining the best of our traditions with some new features to make each service distinctive.

You'll hear much more as the weeks go by, and there will be Parish Easter cards to invite family, friends and neighbours. Today, some headlines and thoughts about Good Friday.

Palm Sunday - morning Parish Eucharist with procession from the crossroads, led this year by Pippa the donkey, as you'll see in the March newsletter... Evening - choral act of worship, Stainer's Crucifixion. Ask Richard Gooding!

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday evenings, simple Eucharists in church with a homily by a member of the congregation. Do join at least one.

We make the journey together, towards Maundy Thursday, mark the Last Supper and Christ washing his disciples' feet, keep vigil as we remember Jesus going out into the night, being arrested in the garden.

On Good Friday we plan two services and a Quiet Hour.

At 10.15am - a time for everyone, all ages, to explore and understand why Jesus died for us.

From 12noon till 1pm A Quiet Hour for silent prayer

At 1:30 ,our afternoon service, 'At the Cross' : readings, prayer, music, silence, and two 'remembrance responses'. Firstly, as we did last year laying white roses at the foot of the cross, in sorrow and love. Secondly, receiving, or refraining from bread and wine, the sacrament reserved from the previous evening.

For some of us, these tokens of Christ's body and blood are at their most precious on Good Friday. For others of us, this is a day of abstinence to reflect the alienation and death at its heart: refraining form Communion will be their choice. In discerning what to include in this service, I sensed how important it is to respect each other in our different responses, to honour one another in the body of Christ.

Finally on Easter Day we will hold our cherished Dawn Vigil at 5:30am- well worth getting up for – and the 10.15 Parish Celebration with a more informal style and all age feel, as we song and say *Alleuia! Christ is risen and is alive today.*

Three Journeys this lent – our **spiritual journey** home to God, our **journey of daily life** guided by prayer and reading God's word, and our **journey together**.

Whether you are here for the first time today or have been worshipping at St Brandon's for many years,

I invite *you* to **join the journey**.