

Our Retired Priest writes

Most of this month is going to be taken up with the season of Lent, a valuable time of reflection in the Christian year. Liturgically we begin Lent with a service on Ash Wednesday, in the morning and in the evening so that everyone has an opportunity to set themselves on course, as it were. The imposition of ashes is also offered at these services, the receiving of which is a humbling experience as we are reminded that we are dust and encouraged to turn from our sin 'and be faithful to Christ'. Shrove Tuesday often just means eating pancakes but this tradition began when people prepared themselves for the fast of Lent by using up all the eggs, butter and fat they had in the house, presumably following a vegan diet for the rest of the time! Preparation is the key to the day really. Its name comes from the priest shriving those who came to confession, that is absolving them of their sins. Common Worship provides 'The Reconciliation of a Penitent' for our use today, if people desire it. (Do ask if you would like to know more.) Part of *our* preparation on Shrove Tuesday might be planning how we can make use of the season to grow closer to the Lord Jesus, which is its real purpose.

We could do this by looking at Lent as an opportunity to discipline ourselves by taking on a spiritual discipline, perhaps giving something up in order to make the time for it. For several years I have used a book of daily readings for Lent and one I particularly commend is by Malcolm Guite called, 'Word in the Wilderness' which has a poem for each day and a commentary by Malcolm. It is a deeply thought provoking book.

It can be helpful to adopt a discipline that a number of us can do together but separately and so encourage each other. There are two I would commend to you. The first is produced by the Church of England called *LentPilgrim*. There are 40 daily reflections from Ash Wednesday until Palm Sunday based on the Beatitudes. It will be available as an app for Apple and Android phones, as a daily email, posts on social media and as a booklet from www.churchofengland.org/lent. Each day there will be a short Bible reading, brief reflection, a prayer suggestion and a suggested action. As disciplines go this is very manageable though there's every chance of being challenged in the process! The second is perhaps a little more costly because it comes with a financial element and that is Christian Aid's Count your Blessings to be found here: caid.org.uk/lent entitled 'Rise up Against Climate Change 2019'. Each day there will be a reflection but in addition as you count your blessings on some days you will be able to represent them financially, noting your totals and giving a sum of money to Christian Aid at the end of Lent. One day's suggestion is to give 20p for each light bulb in your house but don't worry if the end total is too much you can just give CA a gift of your own choice. The room I'm in as I write has 28 bulbs and would cost me £5.60! Don't worry they're never all on at the same time!

May we use the season of Lent this year and allow ourselves to be challenged and drawn closer to our Lord Jesus.

Jennie