

Reflection for Ash Wednesday

February 14 2024

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Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Prayer:

Circle us Lord,
keep light near
and darkness afar.

Circle us Lord,
keep peace within
and anxiety without.

The eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit
shield us this and every day
and on every side.
Amen

How are you planning to get closer to God this Lent? It's a good question for us to ponder on Ash Wednesday and at the start of our Lent journey this year. Lent is a time when we are called to reflect and examine our faith to discern areas which may need some work, and to seek to grow spiritually. Lent is a good opportunity to stop; think; slow down; and wait on God. Time, as our reading from Joel urges us, to return to God in penitence, prayer and praise. This season is traditionally seen as a time when many people choose to give something up. Or some may decide to make a commitment to learning something different or taking up a new spiritual practice.

Some of us in Dry Drayton, and perhaps across the Lordsbridge Team, are going to follow this year's Church of England Lent challenge to watch and pray, studying Selena Stone's "Tarry Awhile" in conjunction with its accompanying Church of England reflections. This is an invitation for us to wait and hope for God to meet us, just as we are, and where we are right now. When we give something up or take something up is, it's our way of stepping towards God, giving something to Him rather than always, expecting Him to do something for us. Having the discipline to miss our favourite food or try something new, re-centring ourselves in prayer could bring the unexpected benefit of reducing our anxiety in the face of an uncertain world. This time of reflection may help us attain a deeper sense of peace as we await Easter. This series is intended to be an encouragement to us to draw closer to Jesus and to each other as we journey together, the focus: waiting or tarrying for God. This may not be something that comes easily to us in our busy lives. But it's a good spiritual practice to take time out each day to be with God. To live in this

present moment and not allow worldly cares to dominate. It's important to take time out for ourselves, and for God.

Whatever we may decide, Lent is a good opportunity for us to be still; to sit with God; to enjoy the silence; to listen to Him; and to commit ourselves to return to God with all our hearts, with a great sense of expectation and trust. Joel's words point out the path we can follow - it's an invitation from God to return to Him, to "rend our hearts and not our clothing." (V12) This suggests we need to take action as well as offering an emotional or reflective response because being sincere in our repentance please God and changes us inwardly and outwardly. When we return to God, He is waiting for us with open arms. He is always ready to forgive us, and He sets us back on our feet because "He is gracious, merciful slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents." (V13). Our stillness and prayer time helps us to deal with our daily responsibilities and gives us the inner strength to live out our faith each day of our lives. Lent reminds us and gives us hope that it is possible to start a fresh. It is possible to create something new, because, even though we don't deserve it, God's grace is overflowing. He is faithful and always ready to forgive because He is the God of second chances. Lent is also about our ongoing Christian journey, allowing the Holy Spirit to develop us and grow us and accompany us on our lifelong walk with God.

God calls us to return to him. "'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart'." (V12). What a great encouragement to us today, to know, to receive and be comforted by God's goodness and mercy. We can be confident that God is always with us and will never let us go. Of course, we are faced with the same challenge each Lent for when we return to God, we can't carry on as usual. True repentance acknowledges things have to change that we need to let go of all those things which separate us from God. It's a continuous challenge to put God first in our decisions plans, and most importantly of all in our hearts. But the good news is when we commit to do this, and follow it through, we can find peace and great joy in God as we let go of our worries and fears.

So let's daily commit to return to God. Joel's prophetic words encourage us to spend this Lent remembering who God is and to wait for Him as we watch and pray. God sees us as we really are -and loves us as we really are. It's never too late to return to Him. God is always waiting for us with open arms and is ready to bless us. So Lent is not really about what we give up or take up. But about our ongoing faith journey and spiritual growth. Ultimately is about where our hearts are directed: towards God.

Let's pray:

Lord God walk with us today as we embark on our Lent journey. Fill us with your peace and your Holy Spirit and bring us your joy and strength and harmony. Direct our hearts to you and help us to find space to be still with you as we await Easter with expectation. Amen.