

Rediscovering Lent

Just a few weeks ago, we entered the season of Lent – a time during which Christians reflect on Christ’s sacrifice and his withdrawal into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). Lent is traditionally also a time when we might choose to ‘give up’ certain things, perhaps chocolate, sweets or coffee. Such sacrifices can seem like a big deal, a hardship and a test of our resolve and self-discipline as we decline that piece of cake, with the words ‘I’m giving that up for Lent’.

Until I reflected further, I had the distinct feeling that I had effectively been robbed of my Lent this year. Alongside others, I had been worshipping, praying, reflecting and looking forward to a deeper engagement with God. Then, overnight, we were thrown into what is being termed a national emergency and any hopes I might have had for a contemplative Lent seemed to be dashed. But were they?

Are you feeling at all isolated? Anxious? In a bleak and uncertain place? Concerned about not having enough food? Tempted to buy things you don’t actually need but ‘just might’? It occurred to me that even within the very difficult and painful circumstances in which we find ourselves at Lent this year, there is still the potential for an even more real Lent experience. With the physical fabric of our daily life stripped down to the barest essentials, we may feel as though we’ve landed in a kind of wilderness. And because of this, we could find ourselves identifying with Jesus’ sense of isolation even more intensely than in previous more ‘normal’ years. And whilst we may not know how long our own time in the present wilderness will last, just as the angels came and ministered to Jesus, we continue to minister Jesus’s love and compassion to each other, as together we look ahead with hope and anticipation to the joy of Easter Day.

Prayer:

Loving and healing God, in these most unprecedented and challenging of times, may we be willing to strip away all that threatens to distract us, whatever form that distraction might take.

Just as Jesus resisted temptation by the devil in the wilderness, help us to reflect on Jesus’ faithfulness to you and his rejection of worldly values.

Although desert experiences may not always be welcome, they serve to remind us of our dependence on you throughout Lent and beyond.

Calm our fear and anxiety Lord, so that this Lent season continues to be a time of reflection, learning and blessing, from which we might all emerge with a deeper faith and a deeper love of Jesus Christ. **Amen**

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