

## **LENT 6 (Palm Sunday):**

Lent is (*or can be*) a challenging time. It can be a wilderness journey of reflection... soul searching... and God experiencing. So we begin our Lenten Journey

Lent is about honesty in our reflection on life, and faith; in addressing our doubts and fears; about entering into prayerfulness and God seeking; and it's about questioning and renewal. *When was the last time your faith took a major turn or change or you experienced some great new revelation?*

Lent can be a walk with the disciples; with them we observe and listen to Jesus. At the same time this can be a walk with Jesus; with him we share in his temptations, doubts and fears, and we share in his hopes and prayers. This will be a faith journey and we wonder if our faith will sustain us.

During Lent we follow Jesus into the wilderness for some soul searching, we ask some big questions of God, we ask some big questions of ourselves, we reconsider life and the meaning of life, and the meaning of *my life*.

In the wilderness what is important will come sharply into focus and what is insignificant will scurry away.

In the wilderness we will face some uncomfortable truths: perhaps about ourselves; we will face some scary truths – perhaps about our faith;

we will face some new challenges – that may upset us and test us to the limit.

What new things will God say? Are we like those of old who prayed: "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more" (Deut. 18:16).

**Prayer...** Loving God, we thought we had to deserve your grace and favour: yet you loved us before we loved you.

We thought you would only give yourself to us if we were on your side: but it was while we were yet sinners that you gave yourself to us.

We thought your love was for those who repented yet you so love the world and your love has no limits.

Loving God, our understanding of you is often not what you have revealed of yourself.

Loving God, your Old Covenant image is clear to us, but Jesus' New Covenant image is still new to us. Loving God, be patient with us we pray and lead us on. AMEN

## **Scripture Reading: 1 John 4: 1-12**

### **Sharing:**

Concerning "*The Church*" – seeking to do it the same old way or a new way?

The temptation is to keep trying the same thing but *trying harder!* Trying harder is preferred to change.

Jesus came bringing "a New Covenant" – would the people be overjoyed and happily welcome the New Covenant Jesus brought?

What is the New Covenant? We know what the Old Covenant looked like but what does the New Covenant look like (1 John 4:7-8; Matt. 5:44; Luke 23:34; Mark 2:9).

The Old Covenant included repentance – how complicated had that become?

The New Covenant was not a covenant of Repentance but of Forgiveness.

Consider this passage from Romans, it tells of God's love and grace (grace is 'underserved favour'): and without any of the conditions which people would later

attach to it. Romans 5: 18-19, “Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life **for all**. For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

What conditions have Christians often attached to God’s generous forgiveness so that God’s grace *is no longer grace* at all, but becomes something merely ‘offered’ and which can only be received on certain conditions?

Consider ‘grace’ as something offered freely, unconditionally, and undeservedly. How does this compare with what you have heard of God’s gift of salvation?

What kind of ‘gift’ would it be if you were offered something which you first of all had to merit, deserve, earn or achieve (achieve by saying the correct thing?) before receiving it?

Could that really ever be called a gift?

“Evangelical” is a word that is often used in Christianity. How do you understand this word?

“Evangelical” comes from the Greek word “euangelion” which literally translates into English as “Good News”.

What is the Good News? There is nothing new in proclaiming “repentance” there is something very new in proclaiming “forgiveness”.

The evangelical faith is not that *we may repent...* that’s not new at all.

The evangelical faith is that *we are forgiven...* that’s outrageous!

To Jews with an elaborate sacrificial system how welcome would an outright forgiveness be?

They ignored such passages as: Psalm 40:6; Hosea 6:6; Hebrews 10:8.

In order to forgive your child do you require penance and sacrifice?

Many in the Jewish faith were moving away from notions of sacrifice to notions of God as loving – unlike the gods of the surrounding nations. In Genesis 22:11-12 we see a new thing... the difference between the faith of the surrounding nations and the Jewish faith is that a human sacrifice is not required.

Why is it then that many Christians consider Jesus as a human ‘sacrifice’?

From 1 Corinthians 13:

“Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one.

Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude;

Love is never selfish and not quick to take offence.

Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other people’s faults, but delights in the truth.

There is nothing love cannot face;

there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance.

Love will never come to an end.

In a word, there are three things that last forever: faith, hope and love;

but the greatest of them all is love.”

For some this reveals the New Covenant of the Christian faith over the Old Covenant with the Hebrews. To some this reveals a God who can forgive without the need for sacrifice where Love keeps no score of wrongs, there is nothing love cannot face, and in an old text “Love bears all things.” Isn’t that precisely what love (at its best) can be

like, where love bears it? What kind of love is it if it requires sacrifice? Indeed one might ask, “is that love at all if it requires sacrifice?”

Finally as a church, in our relation with all people what are we seeking to do? Isn't the Church sharing in and seeking to share out the Good News of Jesus Christ? We can do this in love without any ulterior motive!  
 We can do this without having the ulterior motive of doing what we do so that the other will... We can do all that we do for “love’s sake” and for no other reason!  
 We can love and forgive another with Jesus without needing to do so for any other reason other than sharing out God’s love.  
 We do not need to share God’s love *so that* the person might “come to faith and be saved” – not when God has already forgiven them/saved them!  
 Love has no conditions!  
 Love is always sincere with no other motivation than for love itself.

The great new revelation of the New Testament and Jesus’ teaching is: “God is love”.

God is love can take on a whole new meaning when regarded in this way: as unconditional, grace filled and freely given (*not ‘offered’... given!*).

The evangelical faith and Good News is forgiveness and God is love.

“Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News.”

**Prayer:** Father God, your every thought... word... and movement is loving. You give yourself; you hold nothing back; and you give yourself away saying “it’s better to give than to receive”.  
 You “so love the world...” you love those we hate... those who should be your enemies. And you forgive them when you should not.  
 Your love and your forgiveness leave us speechless... and in awe and wonder!  
 You invite us to share in your ways of giving, loving and forgiving.  
 “O God, we accept your call...”

Luke 4: 14, “Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee...”

**The Grace...**

**AMEN.**