

## **LENT 5:**

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).

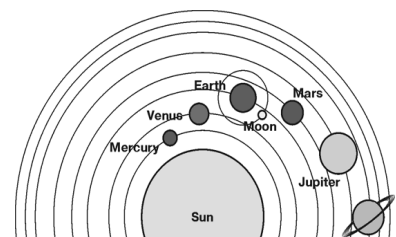
**Prayer...** Loving God, your love is a real challenge to us, to our way of life, and our way of faith. Your love leads us in the opposite direction from the justice we seek. Your love fills the farthest reaches of the universe, and your love is in this place... and in me. Your love is the source of everything, the beginning of everything... love is your own motivation and your every thought and movement in Trinity; and your love for us is beyond our understanding... In this wilderness journey your love has been challenging us to our limit. Amen.

### **Scripture Readings: John 3: 14-21 and 1John 4: 1-16**

**Consider:** "For God so loved the world." Take a moment to reflect upon this. What do you take it to mean?

Reflect upon what God loves about the world... remembering that God is the Creator. God looked upon what he had created, blessed it and called it good.

Seeing God as creator is an important part of our faith... but what does it mean for us now in the light of us knowing the world was not created in 6 days?



What do we understand of God as Creator in the light of the Universe being said to be over 13.5 billion years old and planet being over 4.5 billion years old? (Children aged 13 cover this at school).

The Universe is still expanding – with the furthest parts of the universe moving away from us at 742 km/sec. I often wonder about this... *expanding into what?*  
For us, this is where our faith lives. Our faith is in a cosmic God, a God of the wide and expanding Universe. Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

Such knowledge may be too wonderful for us – too great to comprehend as the time and distance are staggering. Psalm 136: 6, “Such knowledge is beyond my comprehension; it is so far beyond me, I am unable to fathom it.”

This sheds a new light on “For God so loved the world...” opening it up to an altogether greater universal scope, and opening it up to some wider thoughts.  
*“God who made the earth, the air the sky the sea, who gave the light its birth careth for me.”*

Psalm 8: 3-9, When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The wonders of the expanding universe can leave us feeling insignificant, yet we are not insignificant to God. This is the wonder of our faith, of God and of Jesus.

Question: How do we seek to express this wonder in our worship and in our life?

Faith is important to us as it helps us to give expression to our sense of awe and wonder, to express our sense of gratitude and appreciation, to express our sense of thanks.  
Consider how faith may be the vehicle that enables us to make our response to the world around us and to life itself.



Now..., this God is not impersonal. The universe is dark and cold and void, while God is the opposite; God is Bright, Warm and Full of Love. Both of today's set readings, **John 3: 14-21** and **1John 4: 1-16** speak of love and love and love.

These passages are a great new self-revelation of God. What were the previous revelations of God? Who did God reveal himself to and through? Considering them and

the prophets what are the revelations that stand out for you... perhaps in the Abraham and Isaac account that God does not require child sacrifice? That was a great new revelation in its day. What other revelations were there?

This greatest of God's own self-revelations - that "God is love" comes through Jesus. This revelation bursts into the world and bursts into our scriptures. It alone has the power to change everything we had previously thought.

**Story:** Kenneth knows of a mother who was fully aware that her 16-year-old son was mixing with a very bad crowd. *She did not lay down the law.* The mother knew her son was mixing with a drug crowd. *She did not lay down the law.* Two of his friends died from drug overdoses and he visited another regularly in hospital. *Still his mother did not lay down the law.* Every time her son went out she would say to her son, "remember I love you. Whatever you do remember I love you.

The drugs were passed round in the room in which the son sat. a needle was passed to him which he passed on saying, "I can't... I can't do that to my mum..." Of course he was laughed at! Kenneth says that from this story he has always thought, "If love doesn't stop someone from doing something then nothing will. Laying down the law would never have stopped the son but love restrained him. How strong was the love in this situation? How sore was love for the mother? "Love bears all" (1 Cor. 13:7).

What 'strength of love' stories do you know?

What is the strength of love in the Gospel?

What is the strength of love in Christians today?

For some Christians 'love' may not be the 'unconditional love' that some believe in. Not all Christians can accept the revolution of Jesus' teaching on unconditional love... While "This is my beloved Son, listen to him..." some find this too challenging. The Lenten Journey is the time to be challenged.

For love to be love, doesn't it need to be '*unconditional*'? What is a 'conditional' love? Surely 'conditional love' isn't 'love' at all? "I will love you *if...*" isn't love!

Following Jesus' example many Christians have *loved enemies* and *forgiven enemies* - shocking many as they have done so. It will seem most insincere to them if in the end they find out that while Jesus asked them to forgive their enemies, declaring this to be the way of the Father, yet the Father does not do this after all, and in contrast, the Father doesn't forgive *forever and forever*, with an eternal punishment besides.

Love and most especially the love of God is something Christians have not taken fully on board, not fully considered and not fully implemented because the consequences would be enormous. The result has been a Christian gospel of love *with judgment*, a forgiveness that is *conditional*, and a New Covenant that is *not so new*.

**Prayer:** Your love Father has rocked the world. Your love has left us stunned for 2000 years as we struggle to fathom the depth of your love for the world... and your love for us. In this time of Lent we wrestle and pray, we struggle and resist your way. We confess to be your people, we say you are our Shepherd; we do believe; help us in our unbelief. We will continue to journey with your Son in this wilderness struggle, but his way is hard to follow.

**The Grace...** “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the love of God*, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.”