



Hello everyone,

I write this the day after Boris Johnson revealed the roadmap out of the lockdown. I hope the light at the end of the tunnel grows ever closer for you, and for those whom you love, as we now have a plan to work towards, more and more people are being offered the vaccine, and we can look forward with ever increasing hope. Perhaps it is not insignificant that the first dates (29th March and 12th April) fall around Easter when we remember the hope of new life in Jesus. I saw a cartoon the other day that had a shop advertising the headline in the window: 'Back to life this Easter!', and the Church next door displaying the notice: 'Been there, done that!'

Each day during Lent we are offering a Thought for the Day to our Facebook followers and we offer these to you now if you would like to use them for your own Lenten reflections:

February 17th:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)

After the indulgence of Pancake Day, we find ourselves asking 'what have you given up for Lent?' What is your fast?

However, the point of fasting is not simply self-improvement, but to draw closer to God. Fasting can be as much about taking things up, as it is about giving up if those things align with God's purposes.

Perhaps this year when we are already heavy with loss and grief and in the midst of so many restrictions this might be a more hopeful approach to Lent.

Could you take up acts of service? Or, when you fast could you use the surplus to help those in need?

This Lent could you take up justice and freedom? Could you take up love?

February 18th:

Perhaps, like me, you have been enjoying 'The Great Pottery Throw-Down'. Much like its mother program 'The Great British Bake-off' it is a surprisingly friendly competition where the competitors are devastated by each other's disasters. And disasters in this show come thick and fast. Flaws that are imperceptible in the wet clay are revealed in the heat of the kiln, causing the pieces to crack and shatter. Often it seems easier to start again than try and recover a flawed piece. This is how we hear God speaking in Jeremiah – threatening to discard Israel like a flawed lump of clay. Why should he pour his sweat and love into something that will only fall apart in his hands?

But God's love draws him beyond this 'throw away' sentiment. The clay cannot remove its own faults, but just as we see on the show, the potter can trim and refine the pot – enabling it to withstand the heat of the kiln despite its flaws.

In the fasting of Lent we feel our flaws, our sins, so keenly. But we can lift our heads and take courage – for God is a loving potter, and in Christ's perfect sacrifice those faults and sins which we feel so keenly in Lent are taken away from us and we are made perfect in his sight.

February 19th:

The days are slowly lengthening. By Easter, the mornings will be brighter and our evenings longer. As we emerge from the depths of winter we are on a journey from darkness into light. There are signs of hope around us - of the promised warmth of summer and brighter days. Dark evenings are replaced by colourful ones as flowers bloom and trees regain their leaves.

Emerging into the light isn't always an easy process. Bright light throws everything into sharp relief, revealing all the dirt and dust that has been hidden by the dark of winter. When the sun streams through our windows we see the dust that has built up, we see clearly what has fallen into disrepair and what sits neglected. Perhaps that's part of why we find ourselves 'spring cleaning' – throwing open the windows to let in fresh air and tackling the problems that have come to light.

It can be the same when God calls us out of the darkness and into his light. We find it uncomfortable when the things that have been hidden by the darkness are suddenly revealed. But, when we open the windows and start spring-cleaning our lives, we find that the longer we spend in the light the more beautiful it appears.

February 20th:

“The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever.
Amen.”

These are some of the opening words from the service of morning prayer prayed by clergy and others every morning.

There are times when we come to say those words when we really don't feel like rejoicing in the day that lies before us.

However we are not asked to rejoice in the activities of the new day, but in the gift of the day itself. We are acknowledging that the old day is put behind us, and a new day lies open before us with the light of the presence of God to guide our path through it, no matter what the day may hold for us or where the path may take us.

Giving thanks for the gift of a new day, even when we don't feel like it, is a discipline, but one that can change how we approach each new day that lies before us.

As we rejoice in the gift of THIS new day, so may the light of your presence O God, surround our steps as we journey on. Amen

February 21st:

“Full of compassion and mercy and love
is God, the Most High, the Almighty.”

The service of morning prayer continues with these words.

We might ask, where is the compassion and mercy and love as we look on the pictures of queues outside foodbanks in this country, or as we hear of people driving around affected neighbourhoods with food or provisions for babies in the boots of their cars ready to hand out to those in need of them?

The compassion and mercy and love of God is in the hands of those donating food or provisions, in the hands of the volunteers, in the hands on the steering wheels of the car delivering precious resources, and in the hands of those who are receiving the gifts.

The compassion and mercy and love of God can also be in our hands and in our works. Teresa of Avila recognised this when she prayed “Christ has no body now but yours.... Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world....Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” May we be the way that God’s compassion and mercy and love are shown on earth.

February 22nd:

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.
You are the God of my salvation,
To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
In you I hope all the day long.”

Morning Prayer continues with these words.

They say that singing, sunshine and exercise are good for the soul, that they can lift our spirits. The idea of doing these things is that it eases some of the weight we may be carrying, releases good feelings and makes us feel more hopeful.

When we lift our soul to God, we hold before our maker all that our soul embodies, remembering that the weight may be eased because God carries our burdens with us, that we can feel good because we come to God who knows us and loves us, and that we can be hopeful because God has shown us the way to hope in Jesus.

When we lift our souls to God we have these blessings not just until the feel-good effect wears off, but all the day long, from the rising of the sun, to its setting.

February 23rd:

"Let us bless the Lord
Thanks be to God"

This is how Morning Prayer ends every day.

We are used to saying, 'God Bless you' or asking for God’s blessing on our lives, but this is an expression of blessing towards God from us, not from God towards us. How can we possibly give a blessing to God? What do we have to offer God?

The call to bless God, is actually found throughout the Bible as people recognise God’s awesomeness, God’s grace and faithfulness, and God’s love in their lives and in the world. And at that point, the most natural response is a burst of praise that might come out as, “You are blessed!” A joyful exclamation that can be described as “blessing God” in thankfulness, in praise, or in wonder. When we bless the Lord we recognise all that God is and does, and give joyful expression to our gratitude and delight in seeing and experiencing it.

Where can we recognise God in our lives and in the world today?

THIS day, Let us bless the Lord,
Thanks be to God

We know that for many of you the uncertainty and anxiety about lockdown restrictions and health continues. We want to continue to remind you that we are here for you. If you need a chat, prayer, or some practical help then do reach out – either by phoning 01432 273086 or by contacting your Pastoral Coordinator.

We hope these resources help you feel connected as we worship as a scattered Church. Please be assured that you are not forgotten and that you are remembered in our prayers.

God Bless,

Ruth and Jo