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Hello everyone,

By the time you receive this (although not at the time of writing!) Lent will have begun. Perhaps you have resolved to mark Lent in your own particular way? You might have drawn inspiration from Ruth's letter last week and the resources provided by the Church of England, or you might have your own long-standing traditions.

One of my favourite traditions associated with the start of Lent is Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day. I appreciate the solemnity of Ash Wednesday and the symbolism of the ashing, but it's Pancake Day that I get excited about each year. One of the things that I will miss most, and that has been so important to me, is the 'social' aspect of many Pancake Day celebrations. Whether it's pancake flipping competitions in youth club, making and decorating with Brownies or crowding into a friend's kitchen to share dessert with the neighbours, there's often been a social aspect. Even just pancakes at the dinner table was a treat - sitting and eating all at slightly different times until the batter was all used up and debating the best toppings (I'm a fan of lemon and sugar personally).

Of course, this isn't the origin of the tradition, it comes from the necessity of eat up all of the fatty and rich food before the fast of Lent began. After all, there's no sense in letting anything go to waste! That said, it has its links to revelry too - as we see in the carnivals held across the world on this day (of which Mardi Gras is probably the most well-known). Shrove Tuesday has become a final day for indulgence before the solemnity of Lent.

I suspect that for many Shrove Tuesday will have been nothing like in previous years, it already seems as if we've given up so much that there is little to indulge in and little more to fast from. This is part of why as a church we're talking about Loving Lent and Living Lent - because we know this is a season and there is life and hope at the end. There is light and hope at the end of is pandemic too, but it's a little less certain.

The 'shrove' of Shrove Tuesday refers to the repenting and forgiveness of sins rather than to one last day of indulgence. Both the repenting of sins and the eating up of remaining rich foods are about preparing for Lent - perhaps readying the house and readying the self?

Perhaps in all their forms, Shrove Tuesday and Lent are a kind of 'spring cleaning' that goes beyond the walls of our homes and into our hearts, minds and souls. During the first Lockdown (the anniversary of which is rapidly approaching) many people found they were having 'clear outs' or carrying out 'deep cleaning' of their homes. Lent is about more than this 'deep cleaning' of homes, it is about a 'deep cleaning' of ourselves (although there might be milage in the saying 'Tidy home, tidy mind').

This Lent, as we look towards the hope of Easter, let us prepare our hearts to meet Christ. This is a transformation that doesn't have to be so much about giving up as 'making ready'. Drawing on an old Sufi poem (Sufism is a form of Islam), 'Go sweep out the chamber of your heart. Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved.' Mahmud Shabistari

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, Jo and Ruth