



The West Hereford Team Ministry
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Hello everyone,

This week we begin a book group for Lent studying the work of Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*; a path to a better future. In this book, Pope Francis urges us to consider what lessons the current crisis might teach us, how we might emerge from it inspired to build a better world, and what that better world might look like.

He begins with these words:

“To enter into a crisis is to be sifted. Your ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities are challenged... The question is whether you’re going to come through this crisis and if so, how. The basic rule of a crisis is that you don’t come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same.”

Obviously Pope Francis is talking about the pandemic and how we emerge from the world of Covid, but I wonder whether there have been other crises in your life lately, other setbacks or disappointments that make you feel like you are being sifted, that you’ve been shaken up and your priorities challenged.

What has shaken you up this week or lately? What has challenged you and your priorities? What has made you feel as though you may be being sifted? As churches we might feel like this after the news that no appointment was made for the role of Team Rector. But how will Pope Francis’ basic rule of a crisis apply to us?

We won’t come out the same, but will we come out better or worse?

As you reflect on that, here are the latest Thought for the Day posts to accompany you on your Lenten journey.

March 3rd:

Many of us have the experience of cleaning up after someone – whether that’s a housemate, a friend, a child or a pet (or just ourselves!). It can be a frustrating and never-ending cycle. You put the toys away only to turn around and find the box has been emptied all over the floor. You do the dishes to find that someone has dumped their dirty plates on the side. You mop the floor only for muddy paws to run all over it. Similarly, the work of fasting, of making space for God and striving to be a better person is never done. We think we have one thing fixed only to find more challenges, more mistakes and more problems have cropped up. It can be overwhelming.

Sometimes, the only thing to do in life as with our household chores is just to deal with the problem that’s in front of you. One thing at a time. The world won’t fall apart if you don’t mop the floors again, the toys can be put away another time. The dishes can sit until morning. You’ve done one job, made one change. That’s enough.

However your lent is going – whether you’re acing your fast or you find yourself having to start again each day - I pray that you can take time to say ‘this is enough’

March 4th:

John chapter 9

How good is your vision?

“Surely we are not blind, are we?”

So spoke a group of Pharisees, and John the gospel writer places these words at the very end of an interesting story about the healing of a man who was born blind.

There's some uncertainty here; quite a contrast to the certainty expressed by the Pharisees (the same group? -it's not clear) who drove the blind man from their presence because he had testified to them that Jesus had healed him and that Jesus was 'a prophet'.

How certain are you that you can see? A strange question perhaps. More tomorrow!

March 5th:

The Gospel of John, Chapter 9

How do you judge someone?

The Pharisees who made enquiry of the blind man that we were introduced to yesterday might just have had an ulterior motive. Not necessarily to discover the truth, but rather to build a case against Jesus. You see, it had been on the sabbath that Jesus had healed the blind man.

“Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man (Jesus) is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.’”

The rules are everything! Without rules there is chaos. Power structures break down. Break rules and you're judged to be what, a sinner or an outcast? Certainly not someone who has come from God.

But is this the right way to look at things; to make judgements? More tomorrow.

March 6th

John chapter 9

A different way of seeing

“Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’”

What?

In these few words Jesus spells out the way that God wants us to see the world He set out to create.

Our surface-deep perceptions need to be shaken to the core. Those who think they see clearly; those who hold the reins of power; those who play by the rules of the world, need to think again. They need to take time to note what really matters; who really reigns supreme; what really makes for a right relationship with God.

Eye-opening isn't it.

March 7th:

Giving up something for Lent

Have you given up anything for Lent? The usual thing is to give up something that is a luxury of some kind. Chocolate perhaps. How is your abstinence going? Third Sunday of Lent today so over a third of the way through. Keep going!

I sat down to write this and thought of the comforts in my life. I have so many – what would I give up permanently? Looking around me that would be such a difficult choice. Then I thought of those who would not have a difficult choice because they have so little in life to start with. Those for whom a full stomach or clean glass of water is a luxury – a luxury which life quite often takes away. They would struggle to give up anything when they have so little.

Give thanks to God for what you have and give someone the luxury of a meal today.

March 8th:

Yesterday I talked about giving up something for Lent and chocolate is one luxury which is often given up. Chocolate is a temptation to me. Usually, I can resist the desire to eat some, but infrequently I do give in and eat a couple of squares.

Giving in and having a piece of chocolate in Lent isn't going to make that big a difference to my life is it. Giving into temptation like Adam did though, changed the world. We talk about 'giving in' to a temptation as though we are in a fight with our thoughts, and there is something about temptation which can really start to suck us dry of hope and determination. We can be worn down and exhausted in resisting temptation. As we become tired, we can start to doubt ourselves. The fight is internal, in our minds and we can feel very alone in our struggle.

What external help is there? Draw strength from knowing that Jesus knows exactly what temptation can do – he has been there before us. He was tempted for 40 days in the wilderness. Follow his example and you will win and not give in.

March 9th:

Are you starting to dream about getting to somewhere like this during the summer?

It seems that a lot of us are beginning to think about booking a holiday in a warm exotic place. Tour operators are reporting big increases in bookings and enquiries. Easyjet adverts have started to appear on TV – cheap flights to Europe and beyond. Holiday destinations are starting to say that they will accept tourists who have had both coronavirus vaccinations. Seems strange when it is still against the law to travel abroad. Getting away from it all on a holiday is very important in so many lives – 'I need a holiday' rather than 'I would like a holiday'. It seems that escaping even for short time is a necessity.

I too long to escape from this life to somewhere better. Not to a beautiful beach like the photo, but to be with Jesus when his kingdom comes. Now that is a trip that cannot come too soon for me.

This Sunday we celebrate Mothering Sunday; we give thanks for the Mother Church and all that means for us, for all those who have nurtured us, and for all those whom we ourselves have nurtured. We hope that when you catch sight of this flower during the week, it reminds you of the love of God for you, encourages you to give thanks for all these things, and to find ways of being generous in your love and care of others.

We realise 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