



Hello everyone,

After some brilliant sunshine it seem that we've returned to dismal days. Perhaps like me, you were able to make the most of the good weather by getting out for walks or working in the garden.

One of the things on my 'to-do' list when we moved to Hereford was to take up gardening more seriously - particularly growing some of my own food. I had the excitement of planting my first seeds over the weekend, in the hope of some early crops of vegetables. Of course, after the initial flurry of activity we're now left looking and bare earth and waiting for little signs of life in those seed trays... The packets tell me that I could be waiting for a couple of weeks before we see the shoot emerging, and it will be much longer before they can be planted out into their assigned rows in the bed. Hopefully my enthusiasm won't have waned by then!

It feels a little bit like we're at that point in this lockdown - we had some excitement as the road map out of lockdown was explained, but we're fundamentally still in the same place. We're waiting for signs of change and they won't come for several weeks.

I guess then, the only thing we can do is keep waiting and hoping. And trusting that God is at work even when we can't see the results immediately.

While you do that, here are the next posts in the series of Lenten 'Thoughts for the Day'.

---

#### February 24<sup>th</sup>: A series on Ember days.

I remember seeing the strange name Ember Days in the old Prayer Book when I was young. They are observed four times a year, as an old rhyme says:

Fasting days and Emberings be  
Lent, Whitsun, Holyrood, and Lucie  
Or "Lenty, Penty, Crucy, Lucy" for short.

The modern C of E says, "Ember Days should be kept ... in the week before an ordination as days of prayer for those to be made deacon or priest ... (or) general days of prayer for those who serve the Church in its various ministries, both ordained and lay, and for vocations."

The word Ember made me think as I grew up of us as embers needing our faith and ministry to be stirred up (2 Timothy 1.5-7).

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire  
to work, and speak, and think for thee;  
still let me guard the holy fire,  
and still stir up the gift in me.

So take a moment perhaps to remember how the gift of faith came to you, and to wonder how you could stir it up - by getting close again to the holy fire of God, but also by staying close to the other embers too: it is all too easy to fall away from the fire and grow cool.

---

#### February 25<sup>th</sup>: A series on Ember days.

For some strange reason Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are Ember Days but Thursday isn't. So here's a little day-off thing to do. Make an Ember Day Tart. It's a sort of cross between a mince pie and a cheese and onion tart. They were made in the Middle Ages to give, I suppose, a little break from the Lenten fast, and also (like making your Christmas Puddings on Stir-Up Sunday) with the sense of putting God's gifts and the Fruits of the Spirit to good use.

And of course: keep praying for faith and fruitfulness to be stirred up in you:

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

---

**February 26<sup>th</sup>:** A series on Ember days.

Here's a quiz question for you. You remember I said there's more to Ember Days than my boyish thoughts about stirring up the embers? So - where else do we come across the word Ember?

It's a trick question. We don't come across it as a word, as such, but we do find it hiding right under our noses in September, November and December!

Some scholars think the word in English was a corruption of one that meant a "revolution of time". Others, like J M Neale, point to the fact that while the days do indeed mark the four seasons and were a feature of the Roman church's liturgical year called the Four Times or Quattuor Temporum in Latin, Ember is a corruption of that Latin phrase, which was shortened to Quatember in German and just Ember in English. Seemle!

Either way the four periods of Ember Days can be seen as offering each season in its turn to God. According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, "The purpose of their introduction was to thank God for the gifts of nature, to teach men to make use of them in moderation, and to assist the needy."

So here's a second theme for your Ember reflections. As Spring springs (and Lent means spring in the sense of the 'lengthening of the days') see if you can have a quiet word with your Inner Gloomy Eeyore (I certainly need to) and spend a bit more time looking out from yourself, giving thanks, and helping others.

---

**February 27<sup>th</sup>:** A series on Ember days.

Today we reach the fourth and last of our Ember Days mini-series. And there is another layer of meaning to peel back.

Yesterday we learnt that the word Ember probably comes from the Quattuor Tempora of the Roman breviary, and Ember Days are marking the four seasons. Except there used to be only three of them, until the fourth was added by an early mediaeval Pope, possibly to make them match the seasons better. In fact there didn't use to be one at this Lenten time of the year - just in June, September and December. Perhaps Lent itself was felt to be enough.

The focus instead was just on the abstinence and fasting, which probably stood in contrast to the way secular Rome might have been marking them. Here is what scholar Josef Jungmann says about how they were kept:

Three times a year a sort of retreat period was held... (A) week was especially devoted to prayer and fasting. Wednesday and Friday were kept as days of fast, with the fasting continuing on Saturday. And then on Saturday evening a vigil was held in much the same way as the Easter vigil, with twelve lessons and with corresponding songs and prayers. This vigil service continued far into the night.

And that takes us back to a central theme of Lent. However much we also think about what we can do not what we can stop doing, cutting down and cutting out remains important. I'm really rubbish at it. But take heart and remember the last words of St David, whose day we keep on Monday: "Do the little things." You don't have to be a hero. Just try and stir up your faith.

---

**February 28<sup>th</sup>:**

Recently I have become reacquainted with Godspell, the 1960s musical, which had a big influence on me during my teenage years. Church was very traditional, BCP, English hymnal, quite 'high' for a small country parish, with weekly Sung Eucharist, to Marbecke. As you can imagine Godspell was a bit of an eye-opener for me. I bought the sheet music and would play the songs, repeatedly, on the piano.

'Prepare ye the way of the Lord', well known words we usually associate with Advent and John the Baptist, are just as appropriate for this season of Lent.

All four Gospels use these words when speaking of John, words first used in Isaiah 40: 3.

'A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low; The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Lent is often thought of as a wilderness experience, we remember Jesus and his 40 days in that place. Perhaps we can use this season to better prepare God's way in our lives, and in so doing reach out to the world in love and service.

---

### March 1<sup>st</sup>:

The 1960s were the heyday of flower power and hippies, Godspell grew out of this ethos. Looking at extracts from the film version of the musical it now seems very dated. But that doesn't take away from the powerful message of the songs. Another one that became very popular at the time was based on a prayer of Saint Richard, a 13th. Century bishop of Chichester.

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits which you have given us,  
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.  
Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,  
may we know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly  
and follow you more nearly,  
day by day. Amen.

We know the song as 'Day by day'. Again the catchy tune will lodge in your head and it's almost impossible not to sing the words over and over again, which is no bad thing.

---

### March 2<sup>nd</sup>:

This third song from Godspell was not in the original musical, so I have only discovered it recently, and haven't been able to get the words out of my head for the last few weeks.

'Out of the ruin and rubble, out of the smoke.  
Out of our night of struggle can we see a ray of hope?  
One pale thin ray reaching for the day.  
We can build a beautiful city,  
Yes we can, yes we can.  
We can build a beautiful city,  
Not a city of angels, but we can build a city of man.  
We may not reach the ending, but we can start.  
Slowly but truly mending brick by brick, hearts by heart.  
Now, maybe now we can start learning how.  
We can build a beautiful city.....'

When your trust is all but shattered when your faith is all but killed  
You can give up bitter or battered or you can slowly start to build,  
a beautiful city, Yes we can, yes we can,  
we can build a beautiful city  
not a city of angels but finally a city of man.'

Those words really speak to me of where, in my darker moments, I see our world, and maybe speak of where we are in our spiritual life. Let us look for that ray of hope and truly see Christ as the light shining in the darkness.

---

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