

**Pastoral Letter, March 2022**

Dear Friends,

When I was younger Lent frequently meant giving up something specific, in order to test my will power. I can remember the year that I decided that I was going to abstain from meat and embrace vegetarianism for the 40-day period. Then in the first week I absent-mindedly ate a bacon sandwich and later a sausage roll. When I realised that I had broken my Lenten vows, about half way through scoffing down that sausage roll, I suddenly felt very guilty as, in my mind, I had failed in applying my own self-will. However, perhaps the mistake I had made was that Lent for me had become more about my power of self-will than about my dependence on God's grace. If we think of the promises that are made at our baptisms and confirmations, we are reminded that the responses are not "Yes I will" but rather "With God's help I will." Lent therefore is not about self-will, but instead about dying to self and relying instead on God's grace. It is the acknowledgement of our utter dependence on God and on following the path that God has laid down for us.

When Jesus fasted in the desert he was tempted, by Satan, to misuse the gifts and powers of God and be driven by selfish desires. However, Jesus rejects Satan's self-centredness and instead affirms a faithfulness and centredness on God. In doing so, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus demonstrates what he is all about. In rejecting Satan's false promises and instead embracing the promises of God, Jesus acknowledges that the relationship he has with the Father and Holy Spirit was the very foundation of who he was and is. It was this relationship, built on love, that would drive his earthly ministry; leading him to the cross and giving up his life for humankind, as the ultimate act of self-sacrifice and love.

In many ways, Lent is about testing and dying, although perhaps in a much more positive sense than we conventionally think about both of those concepts! The testing is about how we grow in our faith and understanding, as our self-centredness is stripped away along with all those associated things that are unhelpful in our spiritual lives. In dying to ourselves we begin to embrace the new life and selfless love of God found in Christ, in dying to our self-centredness we start to re-focus ourselves on our spiritual relationship with God, and in dying to what is temporary we begin to embrace what is eternal. We do all these things with and through God's help and power, not our own, following the way of Christ who affirmed his reliance on the relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In all these things we must remember is that death is not the end. As Christ rose on Easter morning, we too can experience the new life that is given to us by God in the Easter season. That is what Lent is about for me and I hope for all of us: Not self-will, but dying to ourselves and embracing the new life given to us in Christ at Easter as we acknowledge God's purpose and plan for us and the goodness of his promises.

This Lent season the Northampton Methodist Circuit is sharing the 'All We Can' Ukraine Emergency Appeal as one way to share God's love with others. Please visit the website to find out more:

<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/donate/ukraine/>

We hope that this will be one of the many ways that we can respond in love during this season of Lent.

Have a reflective Lent and a joyful Easter.

Yours faithfully,

Revd David Speirs



## Six short prayers for Lent from the Methodist Church.

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/lent-and-easter/prayers-for-lent-and-easter/>

Lord, as we enter Lent help us to draw near to you in praise, stripping away all that distracts us from worship. **Amen**

As Jesus resisted temptation by the devil in the wilderness, help us reflect on his faithfulness to God, his rejection of worldly values and hold these thoughts in our hearts throughout Lent and beyond. **Amen**

Jesus, you prayed and fasted. As your disciple teach me about spiritual discipline in my relationship with you. **Amen**

Lord may Lent be a time of inward searching that makes me more able to look with compassion at the needs of the world. **Amen**

Thank you, Lord, for desert experiences, when being confronted with myself makes me realise my need of you. **Amen**

Lord, you have guided us through the difficult days of Lent, encouraging us along the way. We pray as we move towards the darkest day, that you will not forsake us but remind us of our Saviour's ultimate gift and promise of new, abundant, eternal life for all who believe and trust in him, your precious son, Jesus. **Amen**