

Dear Friend

The purpose of Lent is to lead us closer to our holy and heavenly Father by allowing the light and heat of the Holy Spirit to purify us as precious metal is purified in the fire. Going without something we enjoy - whatever that may be - can aid us in focusing on all that Jesus gave up for us. We remember especially his forty days of fasting in the wilderness, facing the worst that evil could tempt him with, and then we turn our gaze onto the cross, where Jesus voluntarily laid down his life in order to save us. If you watched our services on Ash Wednesday or yesterday, the First Sunday of Lent, you will know that I am suggesting something different this year.

The pandemic has forced us to go without a great deal during this last year; in one sense we have been living through one long season of Lent! So rather than give something up, I would like us to take something up, and that something is to read the Gospel of John. But to read it in a particular way. First of all to read it slowly. For many of us there is so much that is familiar, from the opening words, "In the beginning was the word..." to the scene in the garden when the risen Christ calls Mary Magdalene by name. By taking our time with the text, I am sure we will discover fresh insights into the Person of Jesus, and gain a clearer picture of why he came into the world.

Secondly, we can draw on the insights of Ignatian spirituality by using our imagination and placing ourselves in the scene. Alison was talking about this in her sermon yesterday. This way of reading can open up new possibilities of understanding and can also be a way in which God can speak to us through his word. For example, when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast, by imagining ourselves as one of the guests, or the bridegroom, or the one who was responsible for not ordering enough wine, or one of the servants, the story can be brought to life for us in new ways. And it isn't just about the written or spoken word - we can try and imagine sights and sounds and smells; thoughts and emotions. This takes time and effort, but I believe it will be time and effort well spent, as we respond to the twice-spoken invitation in chapter one to "Come and see..."

I hope this makes you smile!



**Jeff gives it up for Lent.**

## **The Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call:**

Each year the Bishop of Southwark issues a call to pray and to give in response to needs in our own diocese, as well as in our link dioceses in Zimbabwe, and this year Jerusalem. The focus this year is on food poverty. Here is the link to the material: <https://southwark.anglican.org/news-events/events/lent-call/resources/> Please do look at it and pray over these situations and respond by giving as generously as you can, either online or by cheque which you can make payable to St Matthew's PCC and mark the envelope "Lent Call". Here is the focus for week one for the Croydon Episcopal Area:

Thank you, on behalf of the diocese, for your support.

I do hope you have a good week and enjoy diving deeply into the Gospel of John!

With much love and prayers

Simon