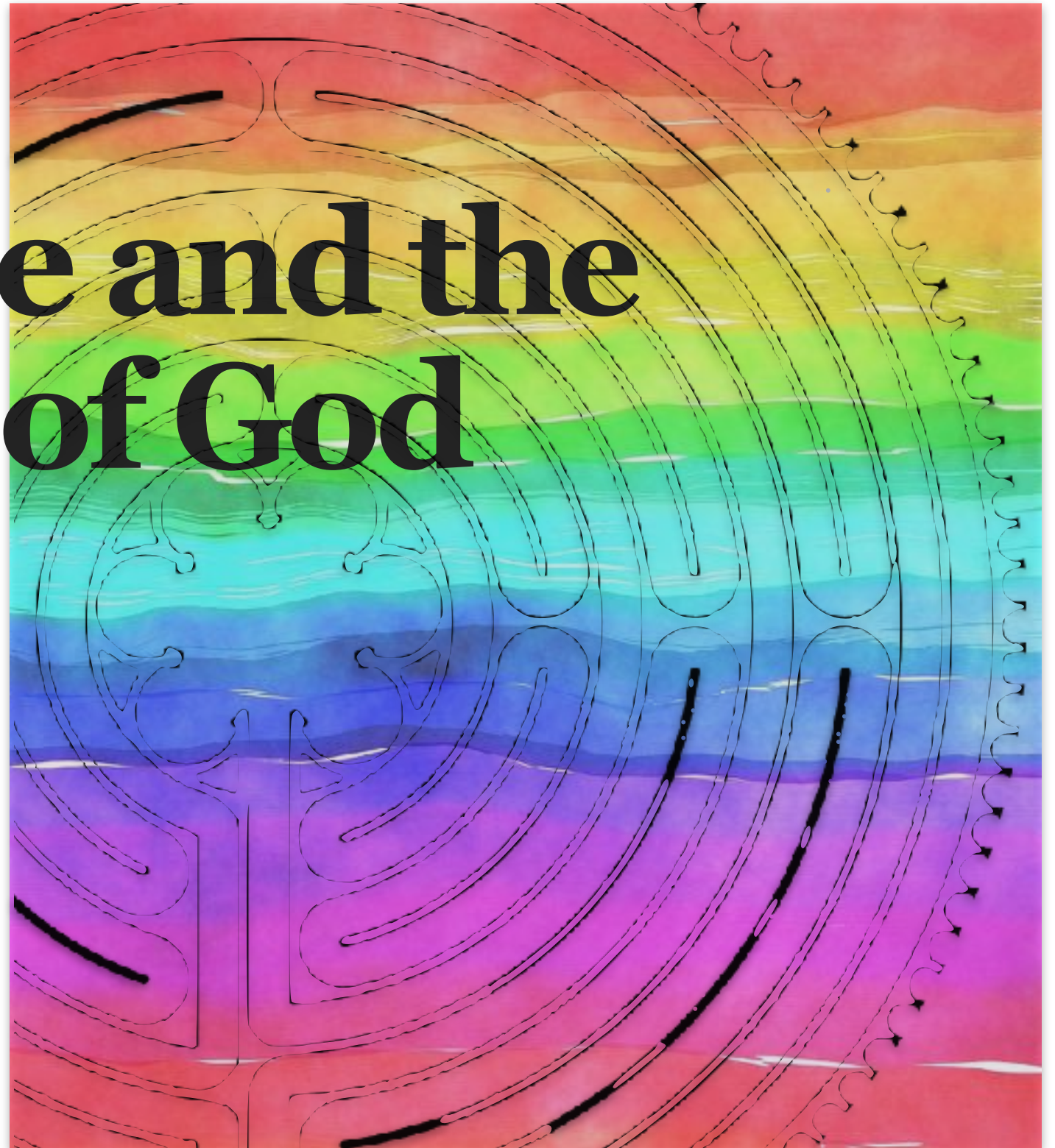


Pilgrimage and the Promises of God

Journeying through a lockdown Lent, and beyond.



Welcome

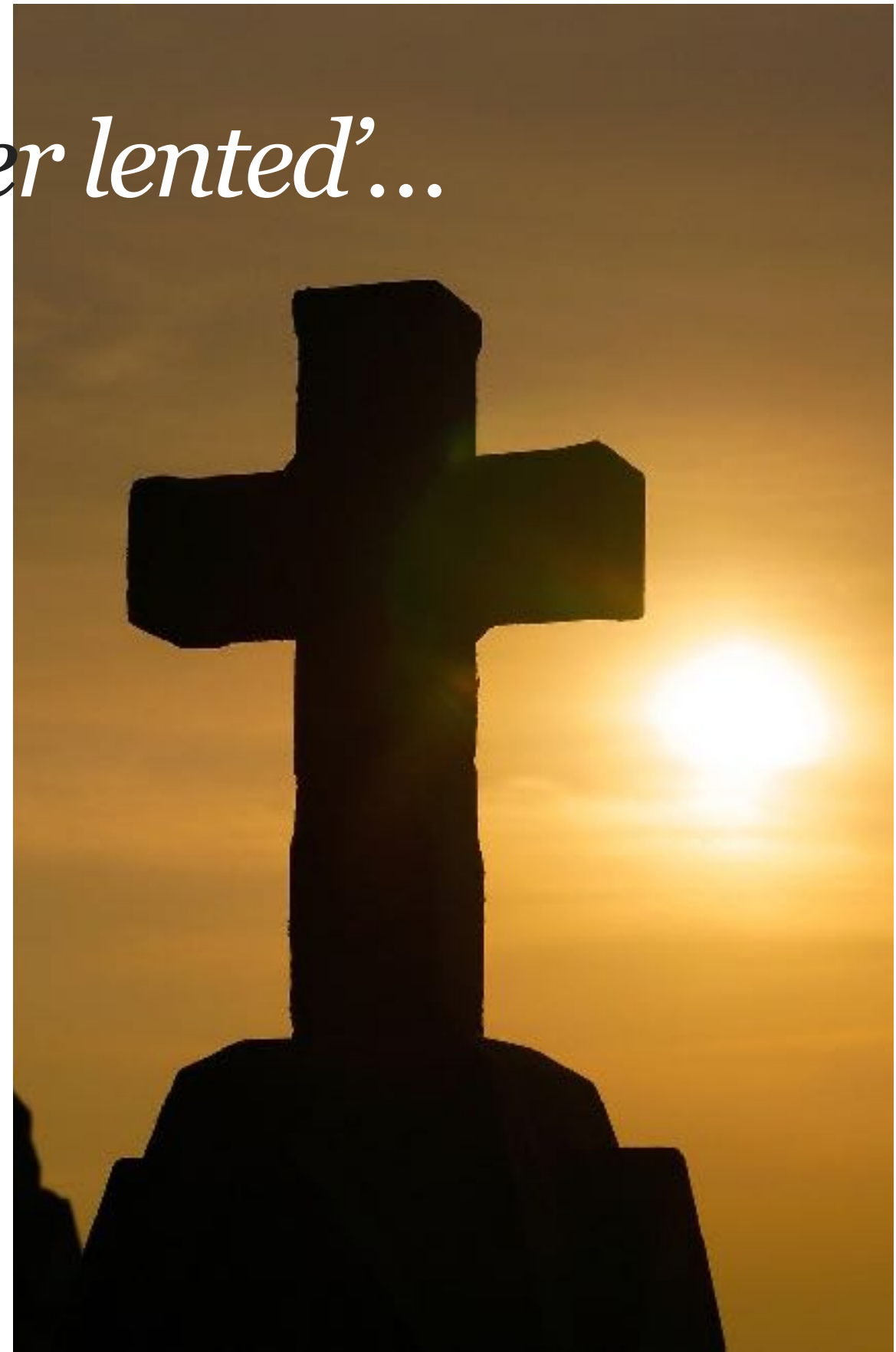
'The lentiest lent I ever lented'...

This quote was shared and re-shared on many a social media profile last year in response to our first lockdown Lent, and here we are a year on, looking at another 'lentiest' of Lents. Praise God that the vaccine is well within sight, but life, let alone Lent, will still be very different from that which we are used to.

How are we to *do* Lent in these circumstances? It's traditionally the season to embrace deprivation, but we have been embracing (or enduring) deprivation for over a year, finding ourselves deprived of so many people and things, that we love?

At St Mary and St B's, we suggest that you don't give up anything, but instead treat Lent as a kind of journey — like a pilgrimage. It might seem a strange suggestion given the current restrictions, but we can journey in different ways. No pilgrimage is ever all downhill, but, if the pilgrim is alert to what is around them, even in the uphill, there will be moments of grace along the way.

This little booklet contains a few no-pressure suggestions about how to pilgrimage through another 'lenty' lent.

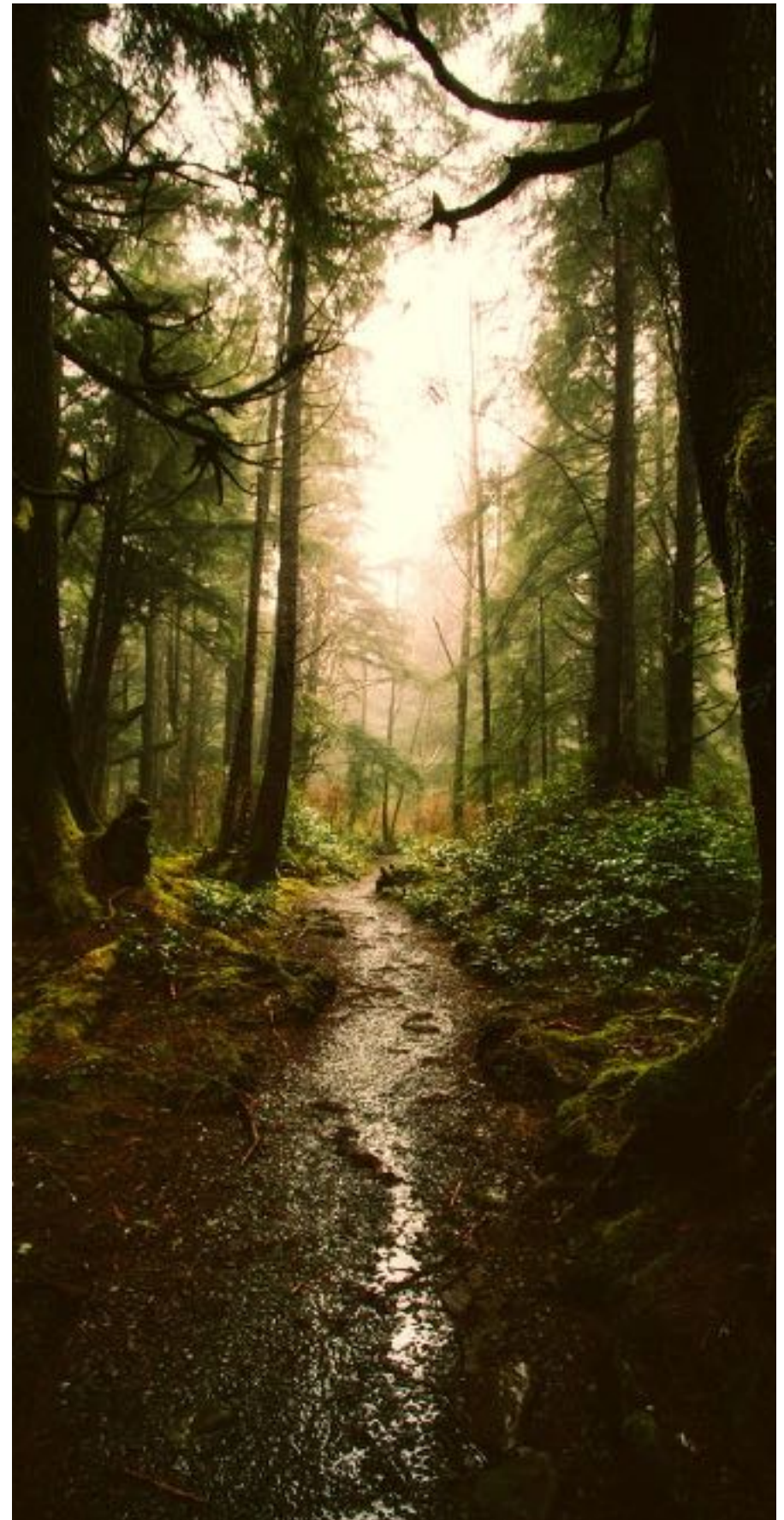


What's on in Lent?

Pilgrimage Routes

Here is a list of things on offer during Lent across the benefice. Feel free to try different things without pressure to continue if you find it's not for you.

- **Mini Pilgrimages** — This booklet contains suggestions for how to turn a daily walk into a mini pilgrimage. There is one per week with a reading from the Old Testament about the oldest promises of God, plus things to do and think about, with options to make it family friendly. With so many having to isolate at the moment, some of us may have to pilgrimage notionally, but the idea is to draw on the wonder of creation to add a little intentionality to the day.
- **Sunday Services** — Sunday services (Zoom and Podcasts) will use the same Old Testament readings as the pilgrimages.
- **Lent Book** — If groups aren't your thing, try reading James Martin SJ's account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Or the Living Lent





Wonder leads us into this vast stillness, where in awe, we breathe afresh the breath of God.

Bob Holmes, Come Into The Quiet, Photo Fr Mark Bennet

An invitation to Wonder

The next few pages are devoted to weekly mini pilgrimages. Each week there is a reading, and short reflection by one of the clergy team, and a suggestion or two for ways to turn a walk into a pilgrimage. We suggest you try to read the Bible text and reflection before you walk as we'll be suggest food

for thought along the way. If you have children, or enjoy a more hands on approach — try the activities. And if you collect anything, or draw, paint, or write anything that you (or your children) would like to share. Do bring it along to either of the Zoom services on Sundays.

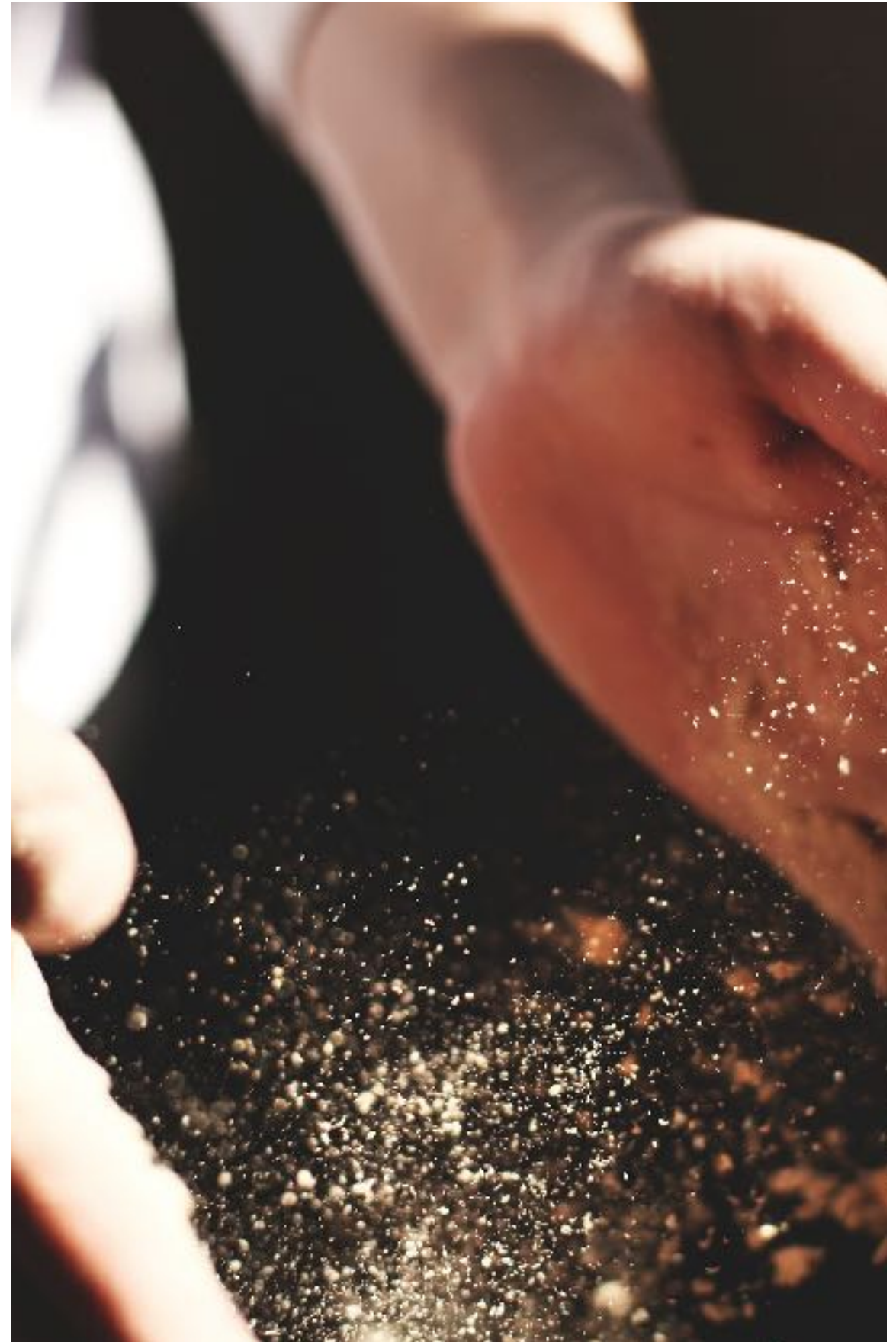
Ash Wednesday

Dust and glory

Turning (and returning) to God

Joel is talking here about the Day of Atonement, he's writing from that point in Jewish history when the Day of the Lord, the Day of Atonement, was expected imminently.

In many ways the Day of Atonement and Ash Wednesday have a lot in common, I remember the Day of Atonement so vividly from when I lived in the Golders Green area of London; everything shut down and everyone went to the synagogue. On the Day of Atonement people talked about their sins as things of the past, and they talked about atonement as something that would happen in the future, on Ash Wednesday we talk about our sins too — but we talk about a Day of Atonement that's already in the past.



On Ash Wednesday we go to church and have a cross made on their forehead, and its quite solemn words we hear: *remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return, turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.* Its a very similar message to the Day of Atonement, with its encouragement to turn from sin, but the difference is that we believe the death and resurrection of Jesus is adequate for the forgiveness for every sin that has ever been committed — and every sin that will ever be committed — provided we turn him.

When I was about 20 there was a new vicar at our church and he told me about the greek word *metanoia*, which often gets translated as ‘repentance’, but it really means something more like a total mind change. Joel talks about changing your heart not your garments; it’s an inward change, and it’s the same inward change that Jesus talks about in Matthew’s gospel when he says ‘put oil on your head’ (Matthew 6:16), don’t put dust on your head — repent quietly.

Years ago when I was running a youth fellowship group, we had a new lad come along one day, and after a few weeks of coming to church I asked him: “So what do you make of it all?” And he replied that he quite enjoyed it but he didn’t understand why, right at the beginning of every service, everyone had to think of all the bad things they’d done, and then they’d get forgiven, but next week, they had to do the same thing all over again. “Do the old people ever learn to do any better than the younger ones?” he asked.

I laughed and quoted Martin Luther who said “The truest repentance is to do it no more”, but of course that it beyond all of us.

That is the point of Ash Wednesday; that we keep remembering our sins and reminding ourselves to turn, and return, to Christ. We won’t be perfect in this life, but we can be a darn site better than we are now.

David Winter

Joel 2: 1–2 & 12–17

*Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy hill.
Let all who live in the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming.
It is close at hand—
“Even now,” declares the Lord,
 “return to me with all your heart,
 with fasting and weeping and mourning.”
Rend your heart
 and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,
 for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
 and he relents from sending calamity.
Who knows? He may turn and relent
 and leave behind a blessing—
grain offerings and drink offerings
 for the Lord your God. (Continued overleaf)*

Pilgrimage Activities

Thoughts for the day:

When you are walking today (or making a pilgrimage around your garden, or from your living room) take some time to think about times you have turned, or returned, to God. Think about the direction you are traveling in, and how you navigate your way, both on your walk and in your life.

If you have children with you on your walk, it can be fun to play ‘sat nav’ and let them choose the direction you walk in, or let them have a go at reading a map — talk about how we decide which way to go.

Joel, cont’d: *Blow the trumpet in Zion,
declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.*

*Gather the people,
consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders,
gather the children, those nursing at the breast.*

*Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her chamber.*

Let the priests, who minister before the Lord,



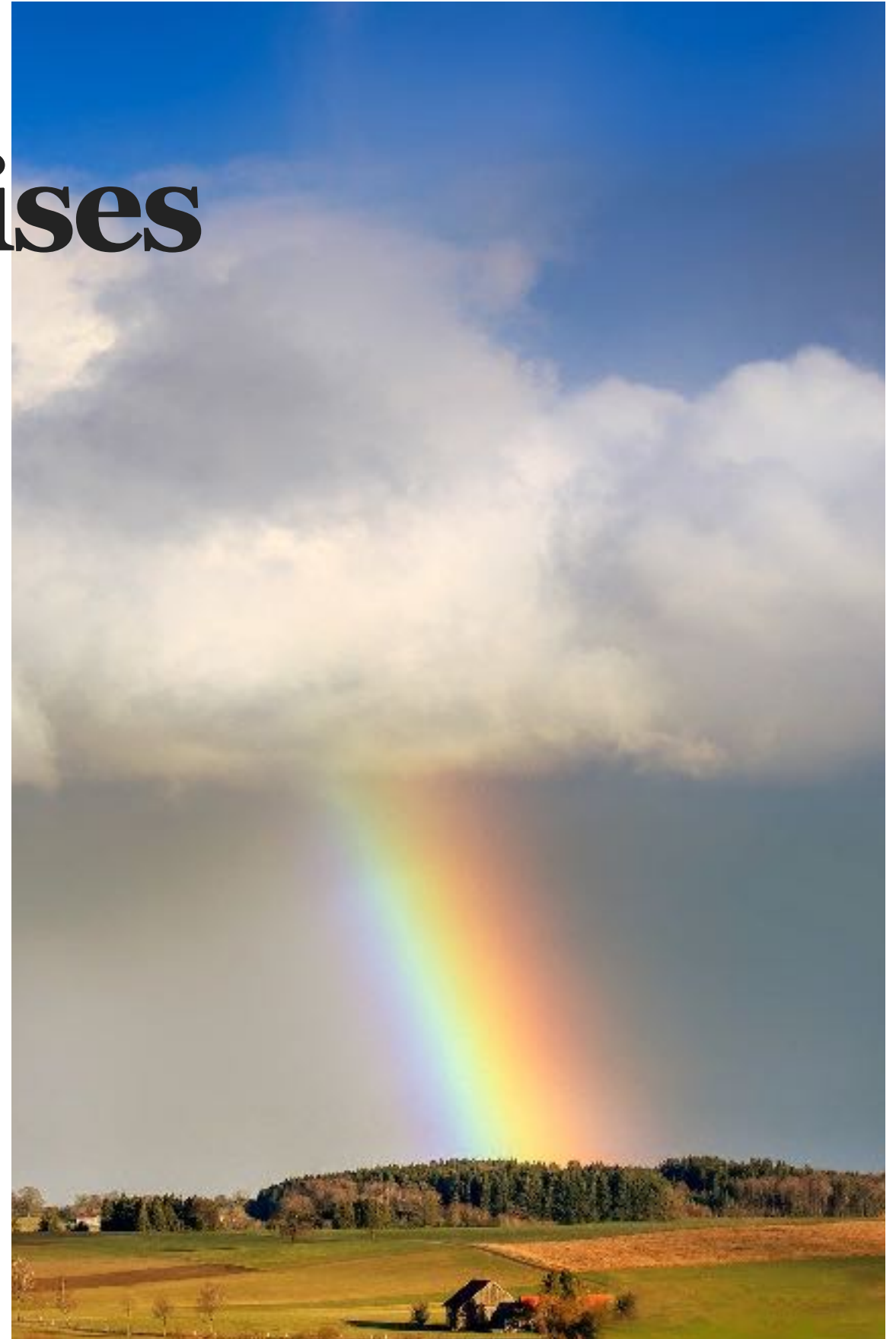
*weep between the portico and the altar.
Let them say, “Spare your people, Lord.
Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
‘Where is their God?’”*

Signs and Promises

God's promise to Noah

Rainbows have become the symbol of lockdown. Last year they were everywhere: in windows, chalked on to the pavement, they made their way onto familiar logos, they were on TV and the sides of buses — reminder of our commitment to safeguard the NHS and to safeguard each other in such bewildering times.

Rainbows are an enduring reminder that there will always be both sun and rain, and that neither goes on forever, but the combination of the darkness, the rain and light can bring with it something unexpectedly beautiful.



I read article that Nicola shared on facebook recently, written by a woman who lost a baby in infancy. The author is now expecting another child, and she explained to her readers that babies born after a loss have become known as 'rainbow' babies; the astonishing beauty after a terrible storm. The article reminded me that we often forget that we only see part of a rainbow; we see an ark, but a rainbow is actually a perfect circle, with no end (and no pot of gold!) Part of the circle is always hidden from our view, which is so fitting for such an abiding symbol of promise and hope. 'For who hopes for what they already see?' is the question St Paul asks the Roman church when they despair at their own situation. The nature of hope is that it prompts us to look ahead, look up, and look beyond for something we don't already have. Rainbows remind us not only that there is much in life that we don't see, and will never understand, but also of the power of hope, to lift our eyes, to be surprised by beauty, and keep us open to the work of God in the world.

For Christians and Jews the rainbow is also the symbol of God's promise to human kind, the covenant he made to Noah, that he would never again wipe humanity from the face of the earth. Some of us might have felt a little like Noah in the storm of the pandemic, but the rainbows reminded us not only of our commitment to look after

each other and the NHS, but also of God's promise to all living creatures that life will prevail.

Angela Brennan

Genesis 9:8—17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Pilgrimage activities

Thoughts for the day...

While you are walking today (or if you are doing a notional pilgrimage round your garden or in your living room) cast your mind back over the last year and hear the words of God: *'Whenever I bring clouds over the earth, and the rainbow appears in the clouds...'*, consider the clouds you have experienced over the last few months. Make a note of them in your mind, then look for any good thing, any moment of grace or positive hope, or rainbow that has come after it.

While you walk, pay attention the weather, give thanks for its benefits and blessings.

Think about your hopes for Lent and Easter — what are they?



Try one or two of these out while you are walking... activities are not just for children ;O)

Take a pot of bubbles and blow rainbows into the air.

Look at the clouds and see if you can see any faces or shapes in them.

See whether you you can spot something in all seven colours of the rainbow, something red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet.

Lent 2

Fruitfulness

God's promise to Abraham

Marcia Wadham reflects:

Lockdown has reportedly brought about a surge of interest in activities such as cooking, baking and gardening. For some, these are ways of filling empty time, for others they are ways of keeping the kids entertained when there are limited opportunities to leave the house. For still others, it's about living more sustainably, and knowing more about where our food has actually come from.



It's safe to say that despite multiple lockdowns, the gardening craze has not hit this house (or garden). Much to the distress of my in-laws, who are keen and proficient gardeners, neither James nor I have anything approaching green fingers. We've tried a few times to grow some bits of fruit and veg, but most of our efforts have generally produced little fruit. It's not helped by the fact that we seem to have a cat with a particular penchant for fresh strawberries and raspberries – preferably eaten straight from the plants! The one thing we do seem to be able to grow successfully is courgettes – and we can grow enough of these to supply our whole street. The cat is clearly not so keen on these!

God's promise to Abraham is a promise of fruitfulness. But it's not about raspberries or strawberries, or even courgettes, but about people. And it really is an extraordinary promise. This elderly man and his elderly, barren wife are to be the parents of many nations. Their descendants will include kings. And all of these descendants, for generations to come, will be inheritors of the covenant God made with Abraham; he will be their God and they will be his people.

This is the third time God has made such a promise to Abraham; each time is slightly different, but this idea of fruitfulness is at the heart of all of them. God is faithful to this promise, although it has taken long enough for Abraham and Sarah to try to take matters

in their own hands rather than trusting in God. Understandably, perhaps, given their ages.

By the time of the New Testament, the world had changed and descendants were no longer the primary indicator of fruitfulness. The fruit of the Spirit, we are told in Galatians 5:22-23, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is the fruit we are promised as those who walk with Christ, and it's the fruit the world needs right now.

Genesis 17:1-7, 15 & 16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty^[a]; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abramⁱ; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Pilgrimage activities

As you walk or take your notional pilgrimage today, take some time to think about people you have encountered, particularly over the last year, who have cultivated fruit of the Spirit. Think about how this is demonstrated, and what the effects of it are. Give thanks to God for these people.

In what ways could you cultivate this fruit in your life? What situations are there known to you where you could make a difference, however small, by sharing this fruit?

Activities:

See how many different types of plant can you see growing while you're out on your walk? How many do you recognise?

Plant something in your garden, or in a pot in your house. As you watch it grow, remember God's promise to Abraham, and how faithful God was. (Unless you plant pot of cress, you will probably also have to remember that Abraham was called to be patient and wait for those promises to be fulfilled!)



Thoughts for the day

Lent 3

Holy Rest

Sabbath and other instructions

Last year during Lent I led a group of people reading the book *Dust and Glory* by David Runcorn. Many of the reflections in that group were about the relentless busyness of life and how we might escape that during Lent to cast our attention on to bigger things. Little did we know that halfway through Lent we would be thrust into Lockdown and that ‘relentless busyness’, or at least dashing from place to place out there in the world, would become a thing of the past.



Of course, many of us have still been working and volunteering during this time, other juggling this alongside home schooling and caring, the demands have intensified for many. And yet all of us have had what is beginning to feel like endless hours, minutes and days in our homes over the past year.

Within all of this, how easy (or otherwise!) have you found it to rest? For me it has been oddly difficult making me ponder, is it the busyness of life that kept me from resting or is it me? One thing I know for certain is that rest is a gift, it is a God given gift. Rest, I believe, is hardwired into our biology and proper rest is what allows us to function as we should. But more than this rest is a part of the world, of God's creation. In this year, in this great big pause we have all experienced, have you noticed how relentlessly we drive things onwards? How hard we find it to stop? Nature, when driven in this way for our purposes begins to break down too. The Old Testament laws instruct that the land too should be given time to rest. Rest is written into everything.

And so, are you truly finding time to rest? And what might that look like for you? In the reading we heard about the concept of Sabbath, a day set aside by God each week for rest. Sabbath is about putting down our tools, ceasing from our work, but it about more than this. It is about recognising that we are human 'beings' not human 'doings'. That our value far exceeds the

things we do and that the world will not end if we stop. It is about tending to those sides of ourselves that can be pushed aside in the busyness of life - to our spirit, to our creativity, to who we truly are when all the activity stops. It is a day of recreation, or re-creation, a time to devote to the things that bring joy, that feed the soul and that fill us up for the demands that are upon us.

Could you make rest a habit this Lent? Could you introduce a Sabbath day? Perhaps these new patterns of rest might last you much longer than these 40 days.

Nicola Hulks



Read from the Old Testament...

Exodus 20: 1–21

And God spoke all these words:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.



“You shall not steal.

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

Pilgrimage Activities

Thoughts for the day...

Do I feel like there is enough rest in my life?

What would feel like true rest to me?

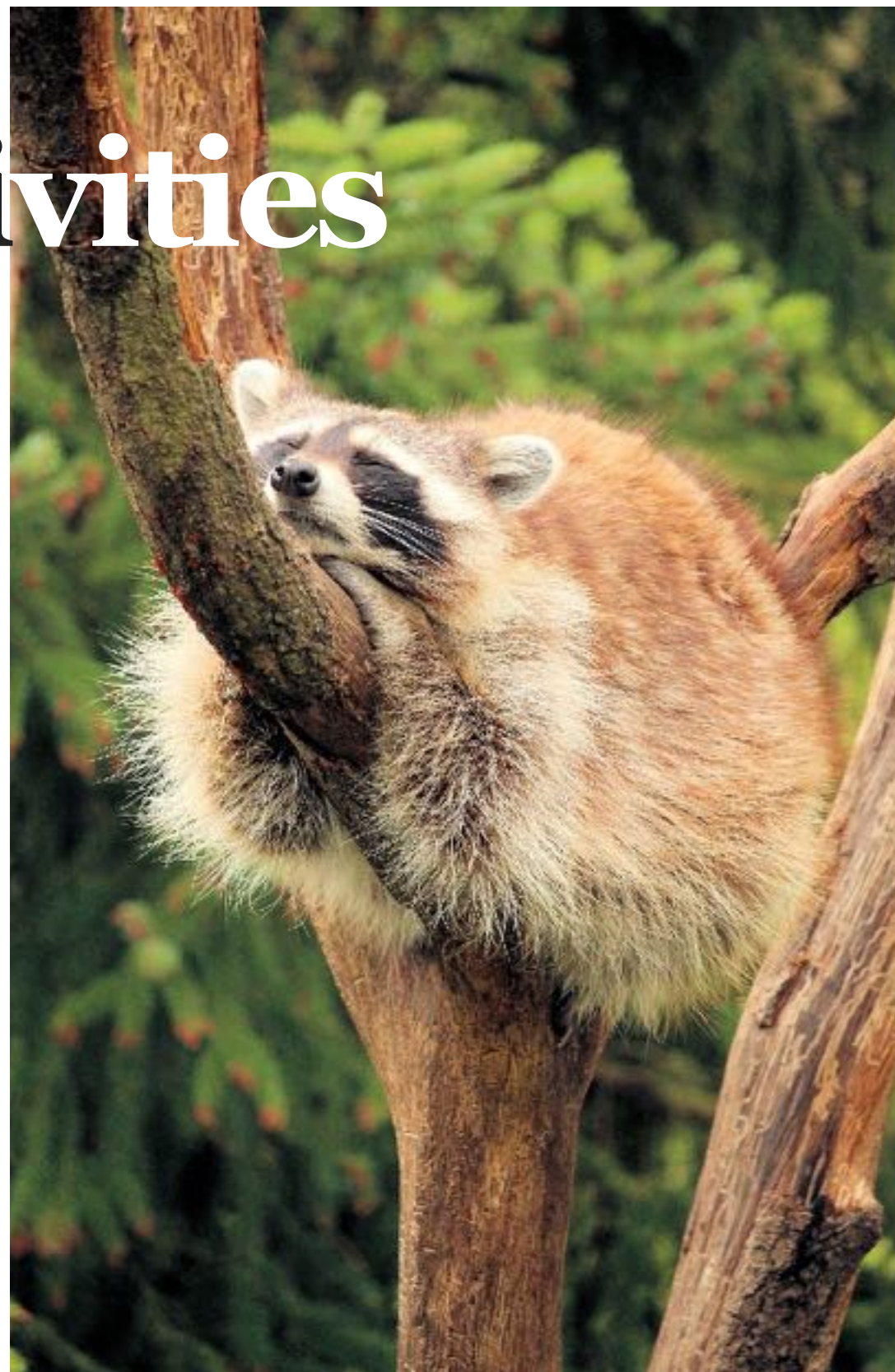
What feeds my soul? How could I integrate these moments of 're-creation' into my life?

What one practice could I implement for the rest of this season of Lent to help me find more rest?

Activities

Nature has been resting these last few months, can you see any signs of nature waking up from her rest like buds on leaves or plants shooting up?

Take some rest on your walk. Find a place to sit and sit in silence. If you have children with you try challenging them to sit for 1 minute. What can you hear? How does this time of rest feel?



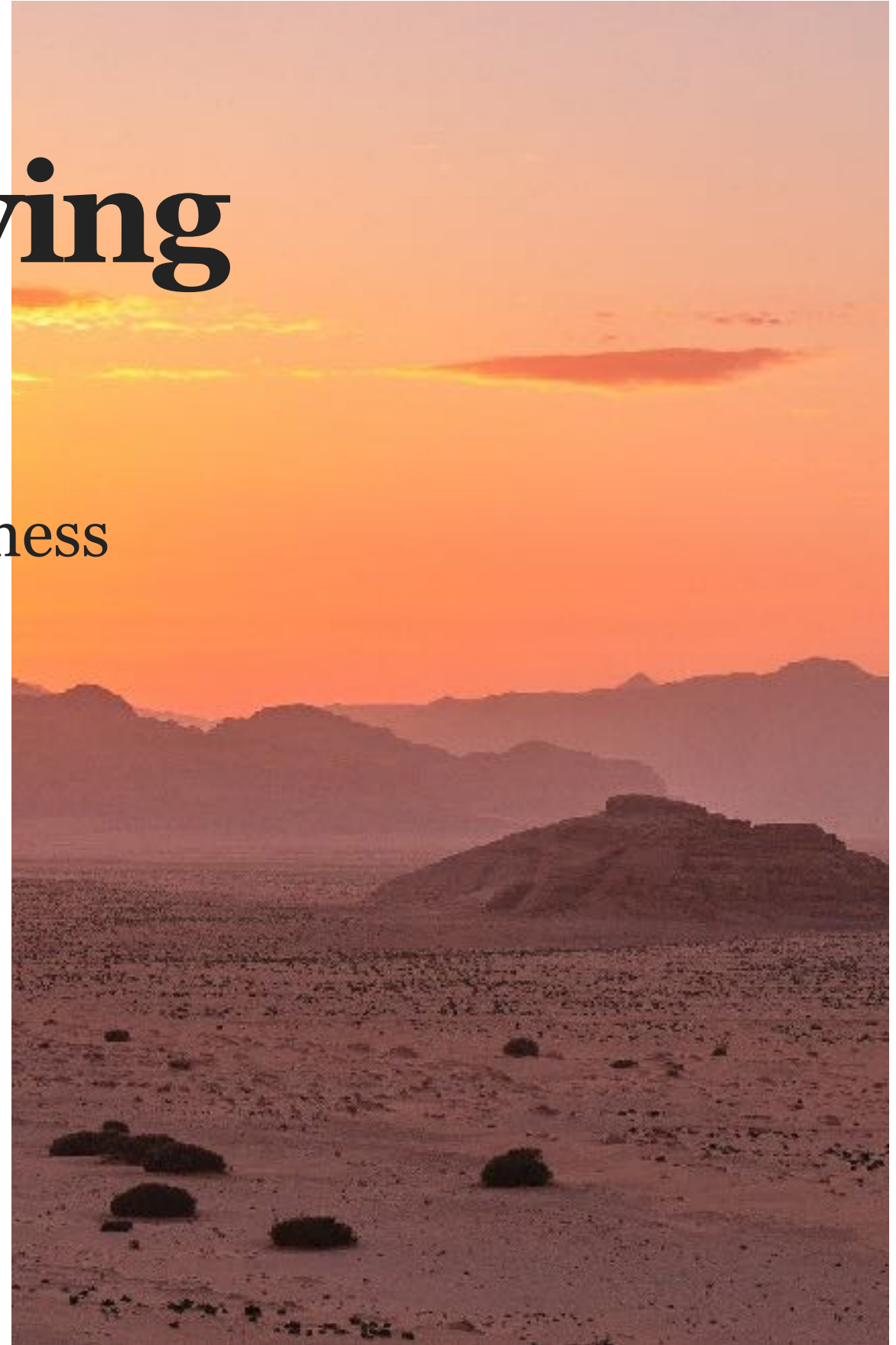
Lent 4

Wilderness Living

Moses and the realities of faithfulness

Sometime in 2020, when we were all allowed to travel for exercise, we went for a walk on Greenham Common. Walking down the centre of the Common we suddenly came across a two foot long adder. Luckily we were keeping our eyes peeled, and easily manoeuvred around it .

Snakes are somehow built into our psyche - they are terrifying and something we should steer clear of. It was snakes who terrified the Israelites in the desert in our biblical story. To help the Israelites, Moses made a snake out of bronze and erected it on a staff for the people to look at, and be saved or healed.



In our story the people complain against Moses and God. They had been wandering around in the desert for forty years and now, because they couldn't travel through Edomite territory, they had to double back towards the Red Sea. The complaints were understandable, but they were endangering the whole mission. They felt that the food was unpalatable, the water undrinkable, and God had deliberately led them there to die, frankly they were bored. Doubling back had stretched their faith in God, but that faith was now more important than ever. If they gave up now, when so close to their goal, everything they had been through would have been worthless.

But the people quickly realise that it is unfair to blame God, so they are repentant. They are forgiven, but the snakes are not taken away, nor do they stop biting. In other words, although forgiven the consequences of sinning continues. But God, through Moses, gives a solution - to look at the snake. This was meant as medicine, but also as a reminder to pray and to trust. They were being asked to look to God rather than their own resources.

In St John's Gospel (3:14-16), Jesus talks to Nicodemus about Moses and says that one day he will be lifted up, like the staff, for people to gaze at and be healed. In his brokenness Jesus points towards our

loving heavenly Father, and the cross is our sign of new life. As Moses' snake was the cure for snake bites, so Jesus' death will be the cure for death and will lead to life eternal.

Perhaps we are feeling as if we are on a journey, travelling through the wilderness. There is much to fear, we can feel isolated and forsaken, and food and drink is sometimes both a struggle to obtain, and can feel unexciting. We may not have snakes to bite us, but we have an invisible enemy lurking around us.

The story reminds us that we are on a journey together, however alone we might feel. Also, that we can look forward, in hope, to the healing power of medicine (vaccinations), and that as Christians we need (like the Israelites) to look beyond the image of the snake (medicine) to our healing God. God does not will death and disease upon us, but dangers surround us on our pilgrimage. We are being called to look at Jesus more keenly, and not to give up in despair.

Michael Harley

Numbers 21: 4—9

They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Thoughts for the day...

On your walks, if you are able to get out, look around for signs of new life around you in God's beautiful creation. Pay attention to things that we can often take for granted or walk by - birds, flowers and plants, insects, the sky. Perhaps learn to identify the creatures by name. And especially as we look up and notice, let your thoughts turn to prayer and praise to our maker and redeemer, willing us to travel onwards, despite all that we are going through, or want to grumble at.



Adults: Perhaps a cross can be held, or placed somewhere, for you to look at and reflect upon, it can be comforting in itself, or perhaps it could become a visual focus of prayer to our healing God. Some might prefer a rosary to hold, or touch a cross that you wear.

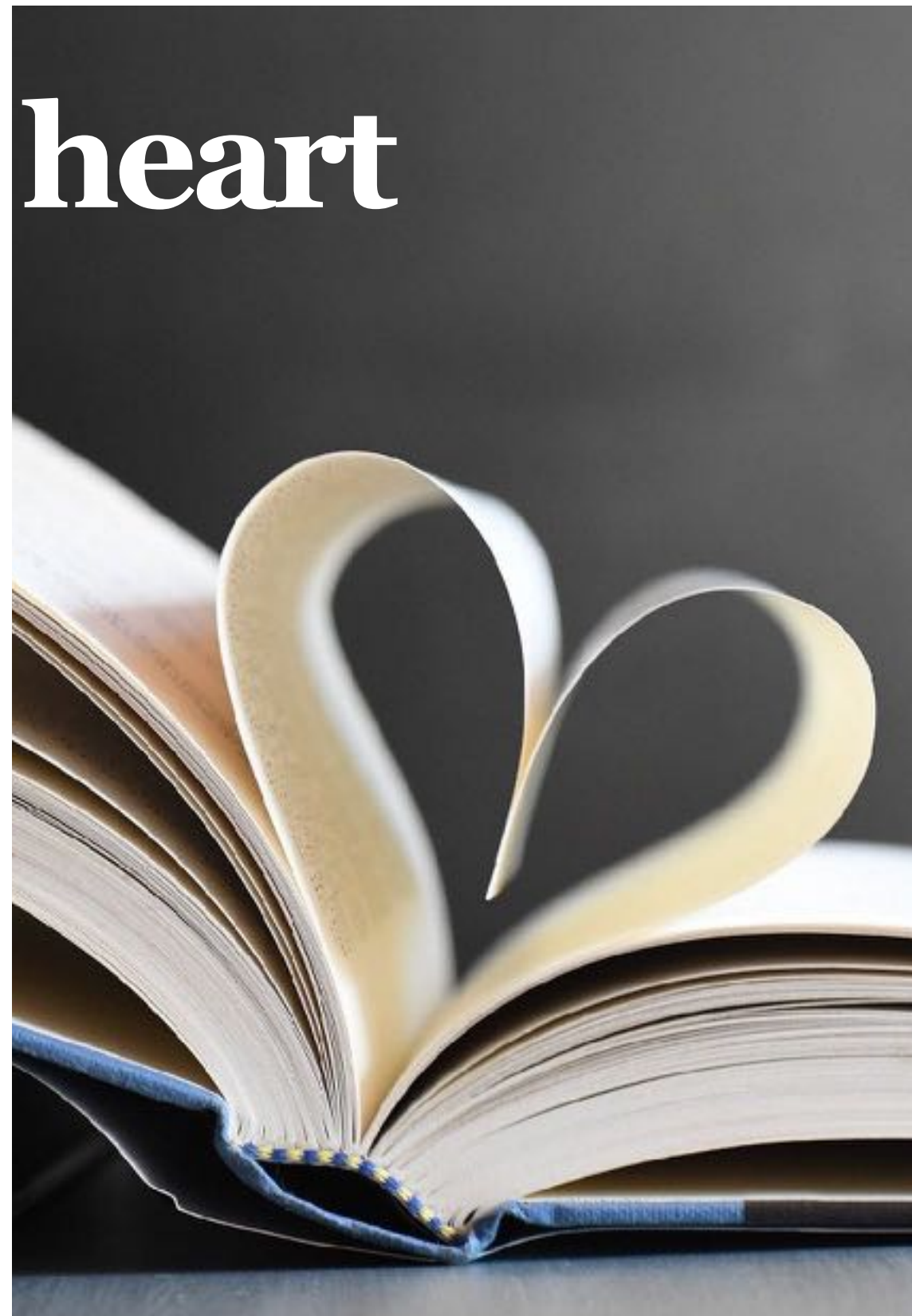
Children: Cut out a cross, and colour or decorate it, and use it for prayer. At this time it is good to focus on prayers of trust, faithfulness and thankfulness.

Written on the heart

Jeremiah and the new Covenant

Mark Bennet reflects...

The Old Testament contains a record of God's dealings with human beings, from the Garden of Eden – a fruitful place for people to enjoy, through God's promise made to Noah and symbolised by the rainbow, to Abraham (circumcision) and Moses (the law, symbolised by the Ten Commandments). The problem always was the human side of things – people were always going wrong, failing to appreciate how much their prosperity depended on God's faithfulness, thinking they could do it all themselves.



Opportunity after opportunity was missed, and the relationship with God was broken. Our reflections so far this Lent have carried us through some of the hopeful signs of God's love and faithfulness. Vanished, the signs of hope and love and faithfulness had lost their power – they were reminders of past glories, rather than present realities.

Sadly, by the time Jeremiah was writing, the people were in exile, hope seemed to have It is remarkable, then, that Jeremiah could even imagine to speak of a New Covenant – of God trying again, of signs not made from the external material world, but written in flesh on the human heart. A bond of love which can never be broken. Sometimes people wonder why Jesus came, and why his death was necessary. Well the problem had to be fixed from the human side and the sign which went with it had to be written in human flesh and blood. Only then would it be unbreakable – an eternal bond between heaven and earth, not dependent on the faithfulness of human beings. A narrow bond, perhaps, even a narrow and hard way for our pilgrimage, but always there, and always found by those who care to seek.

Yet, though the New Covenant is a living thing, written on our hearts and lives, yet still we make ourselves signposts and reminders of the way: signposts and

reminders which have their focus in Holy Week and Easter for their meaning. Jesus gave us bread and wine as a sign – a sacrament – body and blood: “the new covenant in my blood”, and the early church discovered also the sign of the cross. Both have been important for me, but the cross has been a sign for Christians of the journey.

A few years ago now I spent Holy Week at Holy Rood House in Thirsk, North Yorkshire – a place I came to know because it was where my ordination retreats happened. And we were taken out onto the bleak North Yorkshire Moors to the crosses placed by pilgrims to mark the pilgrim routes to Whitby – practical signposts, if you like, for the physical journey, but markers also of the spiritual purpose of pilgrimage.

Sometimes, when I have had a little time, I have looked out on my walks for a piece of wood of the right kind of size. A few inches long and perhaps the thickness of my thumb or a bit more – a fallen branch, perhaps, but not a big one. Stripping the bark I have broken it in two and carved the two pieces so they fit together to make a cross. The first one I did lasted over 15 years – it wasn't seasoned timber or anything technical, and it dried out and became brittle and broke. I made it in 1987, and I remember it still.

Other times I have found a much larger branch by the wayside, and dragged it home and made a cross lashed together with twine (sash cord works well) as I was taught in the scouts. A couple of times I have tried to make it a realistic size to put in a chapel or church. The act of finding means I am noticing different things around me. The act of making reminds me of Jesus, the son of a carpenter. The cross itself, of course, has become a sign of that unbreakable love (as have Jesus' own signs of bread and wine). Even quite a small cross takes time to make with a crude implement like a penknife, but somehow it never seems like lost time.

Somehow, as I notice a particular twig or branch for my own sign, I am reminded of Jeremiah, noticing the possibility of God's love when hope seemed so remote. It is because Jeremiah was right that we remember his words.

Jeremiah 31: 31-38

*"The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.*

*It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,*

*because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them"*
declares the Lord.

*"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time," declares the Lord.*

*"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God,
and they will be my people.*

*No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"*
declares the Lord.

*"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."*

*This is what the Lord says,
he who appoints the sun
to shine by day,
who decrees the moon and stars
to shine by night,
who stirs up the sea
so that its waves roar—
the Lord Almighty is his name:*

*"Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,"
declares the Lord,*

*"will Israel ever cease
being a nation before me."*

This is what the Lord says:

*"Only if the heavens above can be measured
and the foundations of the earth below be searched out
will I reject all the descendants of Israel
because of all they have done,"*
declares the Lord.

*"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city
will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the
Corner Gate.*

Pilgrimage Activities

Thoughts for the Day...

If you can't make a cross, or don't want to, why not look out for something you haven't seen before, or perhaps now notice in a new light – can you find anything which would be a sign of your Christian journey, of your connection with this New Covenant?

Some practical suggestions for things to try this week:

To carve a cross to fit together – this is easy with the right tools, but the pilgrim has to make do, and it is worth taking time, if you have it. You have to cut out a chunk on the two pieces of wood to half-way through and just big enough that the other will fit. Almost certainly some extra trimming will be necessary to fit things together, because the wood will be uneven. Quicker is to join the two pieces with a square lashing. I have always done this with a rather bigger cross, but a small one would make a kitchen table task.

<https://www.animatedknots.com/square-lashing-knot>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhTLWljrMU>



Lent 6, Holy Week

Morning, by morning

Hope for the weary

Weariness seems to be something of a feature of this current lockdown. Many of us are weary with anxiety, weary of being stuck at home, weary of our own company (or dare I say it, the company of those in our households), weary with homeschooling, or work, weary looking for work. In addition, at the time of writing, most people I have had contact with, have been bereaved by this pandemic, or know those who have lost loved ones to Covid19 — grief makes us weary too.

What can we say in all this? Or perhaps, more pertinently, what does God's word have to say to us?



When we join Isaiah at chapter 50 of his book, he is at the more hopeful stage of his prophetic journey; he's got past the fall of Jerusalem to Assyria and Babylon and is looking forward. This text is at the point where a kind of trial is played out; the trial of a servant king figure who Isaiah says will be sent by God to be a light to the nations, but who will be ultimately rejected and killed as an act of atonement for the evils of the world. These are the servant's words at his own trial, as he explains his motivation, his hope, his trust in God, and why he is not offering any defence.

Hope in the face of a very bleak future can be hard to hold onto. The servant king messiah says that God awakens him 'morning by morning' and it reminds me of the advice often offered to the bereaved that 'life goes on' — and indeed it does. Even when our own world has collapsed around us, the sun (whether reassuringly or impertinently) continues to rise. Morning, by morning, life goes on.

In our Lenten journey, we'll soon be looking toward Easter, we have the passion and death of Jesus ahead too, but beyond it, a morning which will change all mornings forever. We will follow again in the footsteps of Mary, in the purple first light before the dawn. With the horror and the adrenaline of the crucifixion given way to the emptiness of the second day, this the third day sees her

weariness as she takes the jar of oil and sets out to do for Jesus the only, and last, thing she can. What meets her that morning is a whole new level of *unprecedented* — and that's a word we have heard a lot lately.

Mary's weariness is renewed that morning in a way that is total and unexpected, and perhaps what we can take from her story, is the same sort of hope that Isaiah's servant king reflects in his speech about God's renewing goodness; that *morning by morning*, sure as day follows night, the love of God awakens him. And that same love can awaken and renew us too — like the sunlight that seeps through the dark to illuminate our path and warm our face.

Angela Brennan

Isaiah 50: 4—9a

*The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.
He wakens me morning by morning,
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.*

*The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears;
I have not been rebellious,
I have not turned away.*

*I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;
I did not hide my face
from mocking and spitting...*

Lent 6

*...Because the Sovereign Lord helps me,
I will not be disgraced.
Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.*

*He who vindicates me is near.
Who then will bring charges against me?
Let us face each other!
Who is my accuser?
Let him confront me!
It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me.
Who will condemn me?*

Pilgrimage Activities

Thoughts for the day...

If your schedule and energy levels permit, it can be interesting to walk a familiar route at a different time of day, try going at dawn or dusk, and notice the light and the differences in the wildlife around you.

Think about what enlivens and deadens you, make a mental list (or write it down). This is a conversation it is good to have with children as well as adults, children often have a very clear idea of what makes them feel full of life and energy, and what drains them. It is no bad idea to revisit the list occasionally, to note any changes to what you find livening and deadening, its a good sort of spiritual balance-check.



Notes
