

## St Mary's and St Augustine's Reflection and Prayers: First Sunday of Lent, Feb 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

**Readings: Psalm 25: 1-9; Genesis 9: 8-17; 1Pet. 3. 18-end; Mark 1.9-15.**

**This week's reflection is written by Claire.**

I have started reading *Lent in Plain Sight* by Jill Duffield, I'm on day two – whether I manage to read it every day in Lent remains to be seen but I have found it a helpful start. The reflections on dust and how sometimes in life we can feel 'ground to dust' or walking through a season of endless Lent when the darkness seems impenetrable and 'no alleluias are uttered'. This time of enforced restrictions and the awful deaths attributed to the last 12 months of Covid mean that we have found ourselves, like the children in C.S. Lewis's Narnia, under the spell of the White Witch where it is always winter but never Christmas.

So as winter literally thawed this week and the sun finally came out, I ventured out on my daily walk. As the mantle of snow which had been clinging to the frozen earth finally melted, I was struck by a display of purple crocus. It seems that the snow, the winter had been holding everything at bay, but actually it did not have the power to stop life coming. And as soon as there was a thaw everything, it seems, has started to rush with sap and begin to blossom and swell into bud.

Going back to the book by Jill Duffield she writes: "Escaping grief, loss, and suffering is impossible. When faced with inexplicable circumstances, asking "Why?" and "How long, O Lord?" and "Where are you, God?" are faithful prayers. When nothing remains of hopes or health, dreams or relationships, but dust and ashes, Lent offers space to grieve unabashedly and without apology or embarrassment. And yet Sunday, the day of resurrection, cannot be stopped from coming. Alleluias may remain stuck in our throats, but nonetheless rebirth is proclaimed. Resurrection is promised even when we find ourselves weeping by the tomb" (2020, p.9).

We have been so stripped back by all the restrictions imposed on our lives this Lent it is not necessary for us to 'go-without'. Instead, what would help us is to orientate ourselves towards the joy of the resurrection. To consider what gives us joy? What can bring me joy in this season? We are in Lent, but the resurrection has already happened. So instead of orientating ourselves towards our mortality, we need to orientate ourselves towards

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea:  
There's a kindness in his justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the scope of human mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal is most  
wonderfully kind.

But we make his way too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify his strictness  
With a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple,  
We would take him at his word:  
And our lives would be all gladness  
In the joy of Christ our Lord.

F.W. Faber (1814-1863)

our hope and our joy and actively seek out what gives us joy what affirms life. For me this meant on Ash Wednesday I ended up in the Botanical Gardens drinking a takeaway coffee and eating a doughnut! I bought primulas to brighten up my garden and to cheer my soul. Karen has made the suggestion that we should plant some seeds, sunflowers ... it is the physical planting of something that in time will blossom and flower. And it is this promise of flowering, this hope of resurrection, that is always with us even now as we struggle to believe that spring will ever come.

*“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,  
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,  
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,  
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”*  
— **C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**

One of the set readings for this Sunday is from Genesis, a reminder of the covenant and the promise God made to Noah and to all people that ‘never again would waters destroy the earth’. Lent is the beginning of the first fruit of this covenant being fulfilled in Jesus. And this covenant is sure and steadfast and certain and, unlike Boris’s ‘road map’, can be trusted and believed in. It is a foundation from which we can live and move and have our being.

We have been stripped back for so long it may take us sometime to work out what gives us joy. But now as we begin Lent we start a hopeful new journey, a journey which has already been marked out for us in love, we are simply becoming more the people God always intended us to be. Just giving yourself permission to spend some time dreaming and imagining what small thing may cause your heart to smile, will open up for you delight and joy – these I believe are the gifts of *this* season’s Lent for us all.

### **Collect for the First Sunday of Lent**

Heavenly Father,  
Your Son battled with the powers of darkness,  
And grew closer to you in the desert:  
Help us to use these days to grow in wisdom, [joy and delight]  
That we may witness to your saving love in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Rev Claire Dawson  
[Claire.dawson@sheffiled.anglican.org](mailto:Claire.dawson@sheffiled.anglican.org)  
0114 272 4987

From the fear that holds me rigid,  
God of gentleness, ease me forward.  
In my fear of surrender,  
God of warmth, melt the ice around my heart.  
From my fear of making decisions,  
God of power, release me.  
In my fear of losing respect,  
God of courage, steady me.  
From the fear of facing my fear,  
God of laughter, loosen me.  
But in the fear that marks your presence,  
God of love, keep me in awe and wonder.

Prayer for Lent by Jim Cotter, 2006.