



Pastor's Page

“Living in Denial”

Yesterday I concluded an email by writing “I must finish now as Radio Five is just about to begin its live commentary on the Man Utd match”. Within minutes of sending the email I received a text from the same person asking me if I realised that the game was also live on television. I hadn't realised that and I didn't honestly want to know! Well, you see I've given TV up for Lent. So the next 90 minutes was a serious struggle. The good news is that United won 4-0 but the bad news is that I missed one of the great performances of the season! (How good was the Tevez goal?) I have to say during the match I went through misery, elation, resentment, and pride! (And that was just at the reading of the team sheet!) So, understandably you may ask “why do you do it?!” Well my answer is that I do it to test my priorities. I believe that Lent provides an opportunity to explore again what really is important in my life. So a bit of ‘giving things up’ helps me evaluate this.

Since childhood I have always loved Shrove Tuesday, basically because I love pancakes. But as a youngster I loved the feast without the fast. “Giving something up for Lent” to me was just a light-hearted comment often linked with diet. A good friend of mine told me that on his first visit to Sunday school the teacher went round the class asking them what they were giving up for Lent. When it came to his turn he said; “*Sunday School!*” and promptly left! Lent, which is an old English word for spring, originated in the fourth century of the church. The season of Lent spans 40 weekdays (not counting Sundays) beginning on Ash Wednesday and climaxing during Holy Week with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and concluding Saturday before Easter. Originally, Lent was the time of preparation including concentrated study and prayer for those who were to be baptized on Easter morning. On the understanding that these new members were to be received into a Faith community the entire church was called to preparation. The season of Lent has not been well observed in much of evangelical Christianity, largely because it was associated with “high church” liturgical worship that some churches were eager to reject. However, we may have thrown out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. This whole idea of giving something up for lent comes from the life of Jesus himself. Following his baptism in the Jordan river he was led out into the Judean desert where for 6 weeks he was tempted by the devil. During this time he ate nothing, and was extremely hungry. **(Luke 4:1-13)** The temptation was real, ruthless and relentless but Jesus resisted and won this bruising encounter as he would win the struggle in Gethsemane and the ultimate victory on the cross at Calvary. Here, Jesus finally and eternally defeated Satan as proved by his glorious resurrection.

Jesus did all this for us and we certainly don't have to do anything to win his favour. However, fasting or going without something for 6 weeks can be a good spiritual discipline as well as a way of checking out our priorities. Its one thing to say “I can live without the television; it's quite another thing to switch it off for 6 weeks! (Especially when Man United are in the running for 6 trophies!!)

So if I seem grumpy over the next few weeks please forgive me but do let me know because I may have to seriously consider giving up, giving things up for Lent!

8th March 2009