

St Luke's in the City

2nd Sunday before Lent

11 February 2007

Celebrating at the CROSSroads

Dear Friends,

Lent this year begins almost as early as it can. We have only just turned our faces from Christmas-Epiphany and already today is the 'Second Sunday before Lent'. Just two green Sundays before we are enveloped in the stillness of Lent's deep purple. We have no time to lose in giving some thought as to how we will enter into Lent this year.

*My first appeal to you is that we begin Lent together. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. This year there will be only one Liturgy of Ashes – **7.30pm Wednesday 21 February** – so that we can begin Lent as one people, gathered around one Table. On the four previous Ash Wednesdays that I have been with you at St Luke's we have been a divided people, and so I have asked the Wednesday 10am congregation to make this exception to their weekly rule so that we can begin together. I am sure that we will be immensely encouraged to look around on Ash Wednesday and see that we are actually all here, in the same place, at the same time, all marked with ashen crosses. We do need each other's presence and encouragement to make the Lenten journey, to turn our faces towards Jerusalem. My resolve to walk the way of the cross is weak and fitful – I need your companionship on the way, and we need each others. I invite you to make every effort to begin Lent with us.*

My second appeal is for a stillness in Lent. Many of us will be familiar with the 'Lenten disciplines' – prayer, fasting, study, almsgiving, confession, service. Many of us will recall that attitude which envisaged Lent as a kind of spiritual boot camp, a 40 day period of denial and discipline which was intended to make us worthy Christians. The heavier the manacles, the deeper the lash marks, the more activities the better! Of course that's obviously an unfair caricature because we all know that a measure of self-discipline and action is necessary. But perhaps the problem was an excessive emphasis on Lenten misery and mania, to the detriment of Easter celebration – after all, the point of Lent is 40 days of fasting in preparation for 50 days of Easter feasting! At St Luke's we have planned a deliberately gentle Lent. No boot camp! The one 'activity' in addition to Sunday eucharist which we have planned is the parish retreat at Hanmer Springs – and that's an 'activity' which is about being still! I invite you to limit activity, so far as possible, during Lent, to be as still and silent as is possible within the constraints of your life and circumstances.

My third appeal is that we travel together throughout Lent. The best way of doing this is for us to actually pray the Sunday Liturgy together. Having planned no other Lenten activities we have an opportunity to put all our eggs in this one essential basket. If we each resolved upon this one Lenten discipline we might be pleasantly surprised and profoundly encouraged on Sunday mornings – and not only on the Sunday mornings but throughout the rest of the week as well!

With my love, David