

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT

“Do not hold on to me”



Pictures of the resurrection of Jesus often show Mary Magdalene's taut hand grasping Jesus' sleeve as if to keep him in her sight for ever. On our journey of faith we're certainly tempted to do this ourselves, desperately clinging on to images of Christ and beliefs that may have been with us since childhood, and afraid that if we let go of them then there might be nothing there. Letting go is an important part of the journey of Lent.

De-cluttering (it used to be called spring – cleaning!) our offices, households and even gardens is often a vital part of our every day material living and so it should be with our faith and spiritual lives too. As we move through the cycle of Lent, Passiontide, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, we move through a cycle of letting go and receiving, of giving up in order to be given to anew. Just as the disciples, we come to know afresh, Jesus the man, the companion, his words and his healing touch. With his companions, we rejoice as Jesus enters Jerusalem. But then, with them, we must let go of ideas of worldly kingship and then watch with deep and terrible sadness as Jesus dies on the cross. It is only by this process of letting go of Jesus in his passion that meeting with the resurrected Christ becomes possible. It is the agonising loss at the tomb that makes possible the encounter with the risen Christ, in the garden, on the road, in our lives.

Letting go of Jesus so that Christ can return is a central movement to the passion, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit, the presence of God, could only be given when the disciples had let go of the ascending Christ. There is no going back in this cycle of letting go and receiving. The crucified Christ does not return to his disciples as he was before. The resurrected Christ is not

always immediately recognisable. He has changed and the people to whom he appears have changed too. They have been through the desolation of Good Friday.

To be in Christ means to let go and finding ourselves afresh in God's presence. This is the way of repentance and eternal life to which we are called through our baptism. Letting go is about letting go, to see differently: letting go of how we want things to be, to be open to how things are. Letting go can be a painful process as some of the things that we cling on to have been (sometimes rightly, but often wrongly,) cherished for a long time! The grace of God will enable us to discover who we truly are, letting go, in order to receive. We have to take a risk by entering into the darkness, emptiness and even void so that we can see the light afresh.



Rowan Williams said: *“If you want God, you must be prepared to let go of all, absolutely all emotional satisfactions, intellectual and emotional. If you genuinely desire union with the unspeakable love of God, then you must be prepared to have your “religious” world*

shattered" (Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement*).

As we journey into the depth, we let go of what was, in order to discover afresh. This journey is essential to our faith and lives, turning our expectations upside down. In the prayer of St Francis we pray that in giving we might receive, and in dying we might enter into eternal life. As we journey through Lent let us enter into that dark night of letting go, knowing that God will be with us, and will greet us afresh in the Risen Christ and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Yours in Christ,
Jo

Ash Wednesday

Please join us for this important service which marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is a time of stark simplicity: there are no flowers, or sumptuous music but we have plain settings. The Gloria in Excelsis is not used in the communion service and hymns are carefully selected which do not have the word Alleluia and similar expressions of joy which we keep for the celebration of Easter. During our Ash Wednesday Service at 8.00pm on the 6th of February, we will seek to have times of silence, reflection and penitence. The imposition of the burnt ashes from the palm crosses, given to us last Palm Sunday, remind us of our mortality and challenge us to face up to the reality of our own death. We can then, in the confession, let go of all those things that hold us back, laying them at the foot of the cross and then we are able to open our selves to the possibilities and challenges of the Lenten journey.

Lent Course: The Cross

Almost two thousand years ago a Galilean was nailed to a cross in Jerusalem and killed. Why has this event changed so many people's lives?

A series of five open and frank discussions on the relevance of this event for the 21st century, following a short Bible study, at the URC on Wednesday evenings, starting 13th February at 8.00 pm.

1 What can we learn from the trial of Jesus?

We talk about trying times. We still question, like Pilate, "What is truth?" A trial should be an attempt to learn the truth. In this first session we will briefly look at the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' trial (it would be useful to have read them beforehand : Mark 14: 35- 15: 15, Matthew 26: 57- 27 : 26, Luke 22: 54 – 23: 25 and John 18: 12 – 19.16.) We will examine the approach taken by each of the Gospel writers to the trial of Jesus and just as Jesus' inquisitors, we face up to the challenge and cost, human and divine. The reflection and discussion will follow the pattern of *Christ on Trial* by Rowan Williams (extremely abridged!)

2 Why is Jesus called the Son of God?

We examine what St Paul means when he calls Jesus the Son of God in his epistles to the Romans (Romans 1) and the Galatians (Galatians 4:4f) and how this is the basis of Paul's Gospel. We briefly look at the roots of this term in the Old Testament and we reflect on how our lives can still be changed by Jesus the Son of God.

3 What does Atonement mean for us today?

We look at what the Bible has to say about sacrifice in the Old Testament and how St Paul builds on this imagery. We reflect on Christian theories of atonement in the past and present and wrestle with what the atonement can mean to us in today's society which encourages us to think in terms of "I'm OK you're OK " and because "you're worth it"

4 What did Jesus say from the cross?

Is there any comfort to be found in Golgotha? We reflect on Jesus' words from the cross, looking at the depth of meaning and the layers of traditional interpretation and imagery which has been given to them, and discover how they enable us to let go and venture out even into that dark night of the soul.

5 How the death of Jesus affects us all

We reflect together on the accounts of Jesus death and the narratives of the New Testament writers, and we discover the life-changing meaning of meeting Jesus for the first time and what his love means for all of us.