

Ash Wednesday (22nd February 2023) is a significant day in the church's calendar, marking the beginning of the forty day period of Lent. This length of time mirrors that spent by Jesus in the wilderness where he resisted the temptations of worldly power and glory offered by the Devil. Interestingly, "Lent" is not named as such in the Bible. It is a tradition which has grown from the earliest church practices, possibly even originating with the apostles, but only formally recognised at the Council of Nicaea in 325CE.

Christians are encouraged to use Lent as a time for spiritual reflection, repentance, prayer, charity giving and self discipline in preparation for Easter. Believers may also fast, sharing Jesus' experience of hunger in the desert. It is popular practice to give up sweet treats during Lent, having indulged first on pancakes on the preceding Shrove Tuesday.

Ash Wednesday church services are solemn and reflective, the ashen crosses marked on peoples' foreheads symbolising the need to repent of sin and reminding believers of their human mortality. The ash is traditionally made from the burning of palm crosses from the previous year's Palm Sunday, adding extra poignancy to the event. Although the Ash Wednesday service to be found in the Methodist Worship Book (page 141) is necessarily sombre, it does also seek to look forward to the joy of Easter's resurrection and the ultimate triumph of Christ over sin and death.

The Church of England's Lent resources for 2023 entitled "Dust and Glory – a journey of faith, failure and forgiveness", reminds us on Ash Wednesday of the very first sin of Adam and Eve, when they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. As a consequence they were banished from the Garden of Eden with God speaking these words of judgment:

"By the sweat of your brow

You will eat your food

Until you return to the ground,

Since from it you were taken;

From dust you are,

And to dust you will return." (Genesis 3.19)

On Ash Wednesday, as the sign of the cross is marked in ash on foreheads, those same words are spoken:

“Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” (page 146MWB)

At the same time, the cross is a sign of hope, forgiveness and eternal life. Using Lent as a time of spiritual reflection and self examination leads to a deeper appreciation not only of Christ’s suffering but of the overwhelming wonder and glory of Jesus’ ultimate victory over sin and death through his sacrifice on the cross and resurrection.

After darkness, light;

After winter, spring;

After dying, life;

Alleluia! Alleluia!

(STF 292 Fred Pratt Green)



Reverend Claire Hargreaves

February 2023

Good News

New possibilities – read the Revd Graham Thompson’s (President of the Methodist Conference) thoughts on the idea of buying a former shop that could be converted to be a place of worship and a centre for mission and Ledbury’s success at doing just that at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-president-and-vice-president-of-the-conference/the-blog-of-the-president-and-vice-president-of-conference/new-possibilities/>

Community Garden - Sprowston Methodist Church on the North of Norwich, have a vision to use their grounds and garden for the local community. Providing a space for connection with nature, a veg bank and opportunities to meet new people. Find out more at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9RFCobRHw4>