



St Mark's Church, Reigate

February 2018

Letter from the Curate, Reverend Anna Moore

Dear Friends

The month of February is a turning point from the long dark nights and the dreary winter. It's a time when we look forward to the start of a change of season, namely spring, which is just around the corner. A time where signs of new life start to appear on the ground and on the trees and life seems a bit more positive.

In February the Church's season is also changing, and we are once more entering the season of Lent beginning with Ash Wednesday. Ash is used as a mark of penitence. In the Old Testament there are several references to repentance in dust, ash and sack cloth; In Job 2:12 we are told how Job's comforters 'raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads'. Also, Daniel 9:3 'So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes'.

The words 'Remember you are dust and to dust you will return' which are said as the minister marks a cross of ash on our foreheads is a reminder of our sinful state as we enter into Lent. It is symbolic of the Genesis account of our beginnings, and our fallen state. On a more positive note, the words 'Repent and believe the gospel' then follow, which is a call to let go of our past failures and to start anew.

Lent is a time of discernment as we prepare for Easter, a time when often people 'give things up' like chocolate, cakes or sweets or changing of habits like watching television. The notion of giving up something is aligned to Jesus fasting in the wilderness for forty days. We generally think of Lent as forty days, but the period from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday is actually forty-six days. Within this period there are six Sundays. The early church felt these should not be included as Sunday is the day when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. So the good news is, if you are giving up something for Lent, you get a 'time out' on Sundays should you wish to, so enjoy!

Personally, I prefer not to give something up, mainly through lack of will power, but also because I like to do something positive for Lent. This could be committing to reading a spiritual book, or meditating for ten minutes extra each day on scripture, or simply taking time each day to think of three things for which I am grateful. Doing something positive that leads us closer to God could also mean going the extra mile for a friend in need by committing to visit or call them once a week, or visit someone you wouldn't normally see. Taking this on in a thoughtful way could make a huge difference to folks who are lonely.

Alternatively, you could decide to buy Fairtrade goods whilst shopping. Fairtrade goods are increasingly available in supermarkets and by using Fairtrade products it changes people's lives and contributes towards a more just society.

These are just a handful of ideas. Whatever you decide to do or not do during Lent, I pray that it is a valuable time to help think about deepening our relationship with God and each other as we prepare for Easter.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna." The letter 'A' is large and stylized, with a long vertical stroke that extends downwards. The rest of the name is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Reverend Anna