

Gospel Reflections for Sunday 1st March 2020

Matthew 4:1 -11

Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent.

My first memories of Lent take me back to a small country church in South Kilkerran, South Australia circa 1970s. It is every Wednesday evening during Lent, where we gather for a mid-week service. The atmosphere is somewhat different to a Sunday service – it is sombre, but not sad and it is darkening outside in a pre-daylight-saving world. We sing hymns (quite slowly and solemnly) that we only ever sing at this time of year and we have very long Bible readings rather than very long sermons. For a boy growing up in the 70s, these were impressionable days of my faith formation. I know I whinged about going (particularly on footy practice nights) but I often reflect on how impactful those services were.

I think it was in fact where I met the real Jesus. The gritty, bloodied, betrayed, anguished, flayed, abandoned, crucified and love-filled Jesus. Those richly Scripture-laden and poetic hymns and gut-wrenching passion readings telling again and again the story of Jesus' cruel and unjust, yet saving, suffering and death.

I knew even as a child, that these were more than mere stories, this was something that I was invited into and intimately involved in. This is where I began to understand what God's grace meant for me. I am deeply grateful to my parents and my church for these worship experiences where the Scripture was shared even to a small boy.

When Jesus was just getting started with his work, he went into the desert for 40 days to be alone with God. He fasted and prayed, and was tempted away from what God wanted him to do in all kinds of ways, but he resisted that temptation. As I read this story (Matt 4: 1-11), I was immediately drawn to verses 3 and 4; *'And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written," "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

Interestingly, Jesus doesn't respond to Satan with anything but the Scriptures - here in verse 4 and then again in verse 7 and 10. Jesus, even at a low ebb after weeks of fasting and no doubt struggling physically and mentally (see verse 11), needs only the word of God to admonish and cower Satan. His relationship and connection to his Father sustains and enables him to draw on this most powerful of resources. What does this say about the power and importance of knowing God's word - for ourselves and for our staff and students?

I love the tradition / practice that many of our schools have who partner with another area of the community (eg church, P&F, staff, Yr 12s) to gift a Bible to a certain cohort of students. What a gift indeed - putting a copy of the word of God in to the hands of every student who enters the school. More importantly though is our challenge to open the word to the children so that they too can know the real Jesus. We have a unique opportunity and responsibility to bring the life-saving word of God to our communities. The season of Lent presents a special opportunity each year to engage more fully with Jesus through the Bible - especially the retelling of his passion. Those Wednesday evening services I attended as a child were saturated with Scripture – Readings, hymns and liturgies. Fast forward to 2020, what can Lent look like in our schools and churches? In our communities where many of our students, families and even some staff do not have a Christian background, opening up the Scriptures, while challenging and even resisted and opposed by some, is more important than ever.

Blessings to you all in your work as leaders in our Lutheran schools and as you listen to God's word in your life and share it with your communities this Lenten season and always.

Mark Rathjen

As we journey through the next seven weeks, I would encourage you to seek some ways to engage in Jesus' passion again this Lent. Here are some possible places;

The Gospels - Try the various passion accounts in the Gospels. Try reading them in big slabs like you might a novel;

Matthew - Chapters 21 to 28

Mark – Ch 14 to 16

Luke - Ch 19:28 to Ch 24

John - Ch 12 to 21

Hymns - Read (or sing) some of the old hymns – They are quite wonderful.
Black Hymn book – No. 48 to 85
All Together 349, 374, 387

On Twitter and Facebook

1. Follow @messagesofhope1, @LutheranMedia , @LuthEdAus
2. @LuthEdAus has included a link to a Pinterest Page created by LEA to post all variety of Lent resources and ideas for the staffroom, classroom and personal reflection. I would invite you add and share your ideas to this page.
3. Post some of your own Lent reflections to encourage your staff and others

Apps

'YouVersion' Bible App -search for 'Lent devotions'

'Despite our best intentions, setting aside time for our own spiritual nurture can easily fall down the list of priorities amidst the day-to-day pressures and curve balls of leading a school or early childhood community. Yet this is something that we must not allow to be permanently consigned to the too hard basket. We must keep chipping away at it. A theological reality is that we cannot grow in our relationship with God aside from the Spirit being at work in us. It is logical that we use The Word to fuel our spiritual fire. As soon as we open up the Word and reflect on it, we can be assured that the Spirit is at work in us, furiously growing our relationship with Him.' [Nev Grieger, Preamble to 'Gospel Reflections', LEA website]