

Beth Charles

8<sup>th</sup> March 2009

In my short address this morning I hope to share with you my understanding of Lent.

I wonder if you have given up anything for Lent? Maybe you have given up chocolate, having a glass of wine with our meal, promise ourselves we'll make a real effort with someone we find it hard to get along with.

I heard that some clergy amongst others have decided to try and live on the minimum wage during Lent and see how they can cope it might just give them and those whom they talk with some kind of reality check.

Or maybe we have taken on a new commitment to help us grow spiritually.

Through our Lent worship we are reminded and challenged, of what it means for each of us in our own special way to be the hands of Christ as well as what it means to join hands with others, to be united in caring and loving. What this means in life is that we dare not remain modest about the way we express our faith.

Now Jesus began to teach his disciples that he needed to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of elders, chief priests and teachers of the law that he would be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter did not believe him and said this cannot be. Jesus turned on Peter saying; Get behind me Satan you are blocking my path, Lent urges us to be different, to look at the world not simply with our own eyes but with Gods.

I'm sure many of you remember the T.V. series Fawlty Towers the one when a German couple arrive to stay at the hotel; Basil Fawlty warns his staff "Don't mention the war", only that he himself repeatedly reminds them time and time again of it. It's an hilarious spoof, but very sadly all too often life can be like that, our set views and attitudes shaping the way we see the world.

Do we imagine we are different, open minded, unbiased, tolerant? I doubt that is true of any of us. We are shaped by our past and we have our own set views as we go through life.

If we were to draw a saint, I suspect we would imagine someone with a Halo and a very loving smile what then would our drawing of a criminal be like. In all likelihood it would be a shady looking character, with a crooked grin. These are the stereo-type picture in our minds and even though we know that this is not quite true.

The truth of course; villains can appear presentable just the sort of person we would trust, while on the other hand, those who might least expect, and sometimes look anything but, can turn out to be good citizen. Its one thing though to know this in theory but quite another to put into practice.

Today most, if not all of us can be misled by outward appearances. The youngster with the shaven head or quite extraordinary clothes, hair styles tattoos and hoodies etc. I suspect many would label them as hooligans I think this is summed up in the old saying you should never judge a book by its cover.

In writings of Mary Ann Cross would probably have been lost for ever but for one thing a change of name under the pen name George Elliott. Mary as you know was to become one of the most celebrated English novelists, writing such classics as middle of march, the mill on the floss and many others.

Jesus tells us, "Judge not, lest you be judge." Share my story of how I learnt many many years ago that my judgement and rejection was a faulty one. A young men walking along the corridors of the hospital where I worked as a theatre nurse at that time, politely asked if I could direct him to the theatre day unit I showed him the way and then we both went our separate ways.

On my return to the unit I had my colleagues in fits of laughter when I gave a description of the young man that was probably on our list that day. He was attired in a green suit, green shoes, white shirt and rather a loud tie, wore an earring and his brief case was multicoloured. My immediate judgement and rejection that was he was a right nerd, by him appearance.

Awaiting the Anaesthetist to enter the theatre to commence our list of operations for that day. A young doctor entered and introduced himself as the Anaesthetist for the day, imagine my reaction when I realised that this was the same young man that I had described to my colleague as a right nerd. How guilty I felt, it taught me a lesson

"JUDGE NOT". What a respected and wonderful doctor he was to work with I would put my life in his hands. I worked as his Anaesthetic nurse for five very happy years and we remain friends to this day.

Time and time again when it comes to making decisions we judge by the outside. Jesus says; do not judge others, why? Because we will be judged in the same way ourselves. Because we have no way of seeing beneath the surface we may think we are right in our opinion of someone that we need to know about them, yet the truth is that we have no idea of their real feelings. It is vital that we look beyond our first impressions before making up our minds about anything. I think of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in her book "Being the Hands of Christ" I will never forget her words, I quote; "in order that in Calcutta, India, the down and desperate need not die in the gutter, rather we seek to provide a place and people. In order that the rejected may be loved and the dying might die with dignity.

Her simple sacrifice would be as the title of a book suggests, something beautiful for God. We are here today as the hands of Christ.

**If Christ is to minister the poor, it must be through OUR hands.**

**If he is to take care of the sick it must be through our hands.**

**It he is to reach the reflected and lonely, it must be through our hands.**

Whatever we do to prepare us for Lent whether it is giving up chocolate, choosing to live on the minimum wage, stop using carrier bags etc. We can be assured that our God is with us, and if we fail, well we fail and maybe this will remind us that despite ourselves we are still loved by our God

Amen, Amen, Amen.