

Hope in the Wilderness

O God, you are my God, early will I seek you. My soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you, as in a barren and dry land where no water is.

Psalm 63.1,2.

Perhaps it has felt a bit like Lent for the past year. A time of abstinence, of deprivation, of simplicity. A time when pleasure and colour has been taken from our lives, and joy hard to find. A wilderness time. Maybe we're longing for the promised land of freedom finally to arrive!

And now, just as, we hope and pray, some sign of good news is maybe round the corner, Ash Wednesday beckons! Just as we long for release, freedom, and opportunity to live fuller lives, Lent draws near again, with its invitation to cut back, simplify, refrain and restrain. Perhaps Lent feels like the last thing we need right now!

So maybe this Lent is a time to give up 'giving up'? If abstinence is part of your traditional discipline (and it's not a bad thing – in a world that often idolises pleasure and luxury), maybe this year you could take a break from taking a break. Personally, my usual Lenten avoidance of chocolate is on hold. If I have a break, it will probably be a Kit-Kat (other brands of chocolate are also available).

But there are some experiences of lockdown that I'd like to sustain. For many there has been more time, more space, less activity to eat up our lives. I've spent too much of that time worrying and wondering anxiously about what lies ahead, and what to do. But I have spent some of this newly released time creatively: praying, pondering, and searching for God, in Scripture, and in godly conversation with other Christians. That feels very 'Lenten', in a good way. I hope I don't leave it **all** behind if, suddenly, we can go to the cinema, the gym, the pub, the shops or the nail bar once again.

So if this Lent does bring restored freedoms, and the scope for joy in our lives increases, I hope we'll embrace them, as we feel is right. But if our lives still have some element of 'wilderness'; some emptiness or barrenness, whether enforced, or chosen, I hope we can meet God there too. Remember how Jesus was tested – and ultimately strengthened - in his wilderness sojourn. Why not take a moment to think, before the world speeds up again - what will Lent be to you this year?

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. *Isaiah 35.1,2.*

With my prayers, love and blessing,

Derwyn.