God said…..Let LIGHT shine out of darkness….many of us feel as though we are living in a darkness at the moment….restrictions on movement…freedoms…it’s a difficult time….but we are getting through this together….even if together is via a laptop screen or a telephone….

It’s valentine’s day today…..I bought flowers for jeanette for the first time….on valentine’s day….I’m a Yorkshire man…I don’t like paying inflated prices….but our local florist is amazing and the prices were acceptable to this tight Yorkshire bloke….So before I start my talk today I want you to do me a favour….be bold and tell someone that you love them…..for some of you.. you will be able to turn to someone beside you…or shout through the house to them…..for others it will involve grabbing your mobile and sending a quick text….for some…maybe all of us…..it is a matter of closing our eyes and offering a prayer to those whom we have loved and lost….and it may be all of the above for some of us…..

I’ll start us off……Jeanette I love you! And you Ralf….and mum…and mark…and Laura and Jono….and you too…..Now that’s not an easy think for a Yorkshire bloke to say….often if asked about my love for jeanette you may hear me saying ‘she’s not bad’….and that’s a proper compliment….but I am turning over a new leaf…..trying something different.

So, join me…..Let’s just take a moment to either say those words…a quick prayer…or a quick text message.

Silence

So less of this soppiness…….and back to the sermon….

Today we stand on the cusp of Lent, in only a few days’ time we will gather again as we receive our ashing and commit ourselves to living a Holy Lent. But for some, perhaps even some who are joining us for worship this morning, there will be a question in their heads along the lines of…. why is lent such a big thing? Why do we bother? Especially as we feel like we have given up so much already….I can’t be bothered this year….ill make more of an effort next year.

To answer those questions, we can turn to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. He is not pulling his punches this morning; he is being blunt and reminding us that as Christians we must keep ourselves fixed on the word…on Christ. He reminds us to encourage our LIGHT to shine out of darkness….and all of this…however blunt or to the point….comes from a place of Love….Even when in other letters Paul chastises the women of the church and basically tells them to keep quiet…..it’s all coming from a place of love….sometimes you have to appear to be cruel to be kind.

Paul is re-centering the Corinthians view of life, he is reminding them that they chose to follow Christ, and that for them and us, following him meant that we have to put away our old selfish selves, and give Christ the glory.

Paul is reminding the reader that what we do and what we achieve, is not about us….its not for us to take the glory…… but more simply put, the achievements that we have within our church, benefice, deanery, diocese and beyond are the work of God and given to us by his grace…..It is a great reminder when we see other churches doing amazingly creative things in lockdown…..and others who are doing very little……its not about us….its not a competition. Likewise, at lent….it can often be a competition of what how much you can give up…how much you will suffer to prove how holy you are.

Our Gospel reading today is a well-known piece of scripture telling of the moment where Christ is transformed in front of Peter, James and John, where they witness Him not only talking with Elijah and Moses, but also hear the voice of God proclaiming Jesus as his son, the beloved.

It comes at a time when Peter has finally realised who Jesus is,….…. Jesus has just told them what is to happen to him, and how his followers must behave.

So, this transfiguration isn’t just about what happened to Christ, but it’s also about **our** lives, what we must do to be faithful to him as his followers, as Christians.

This is where things get tricky, because if we are to live the Christian life, then we must strive to live lives worthy of His call.

But what does that mean here and now for us? Well it means we have a choice, and it’s a simple one.

We can follow Christ through transfiguration, transformation, and seek to live to the fullness of his grace and blessing, being the people he calls us to be.

Or we can walk away and continue to be tempted by the trappings of the world and fail to reach our full potential in Christ.

Simple.

None of us know what God has in store for our lives….I would have never thought I would be standing speaking to you here…..and the first time I said ‘I love you’ to jeanette, she definitely would not have thought she would be married to a vicar….for some our calling is to wear a funny shirt and a frock like this….for others, however it may be that your gift lies in a devotion to prayer, others will be great at encouraging those in leadership….we have some great encouragers here in this church….and then there are those with a gift for hospitality be a great welcomer who sets people at ease as they enter the church. The list is endless, and the possibilities are limitless when love is at work within our faith.

This is why we read about the transfiguration at this time of the year. It is to remind us that we are a few days away from the time of our transfiguration and the releasing of our potential. The time when we focus more closely on what our faith really means to us personally.

If we believe that our faith has value to us, and I would hope that for each of us it does, then the period of Lent gives us the opportunity to reflect and maybe do something differently.

The beauty of our faith is that we have free will, we have choice, we can leave church or our zoom group today unmoved by God and just take the week ahead as it comes….then maybe pop back for a bit of God next Sunday.

Or, we can seek God’s grace through our lives and our actions, we can remove the veil as Paul puts it and ask Jesus to be our guide, to help us to learn how to proclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord…..

I hear some saying…..But I know all of this….I’ve done it before…I’ve been a Christian for 30 years or more….

I hear you….but let us renew our faith daily….as we come to Lent lets deliberately set time for God, to spend time reflecting, praying, asking for His guidance, thanking him for the good in our lives.

This of course is the scary option, because it means we have to actually do something….but I myself am guilty of procrastinating……I expect that there are a few here also that are the same….I’m sure I’ll do it better next year……we use reasons such as I don’t have the time, I’m too busy, I don’t like zoom….well I’ve news for you….nobody likes zoom!!. But in reality, what we are actually saying is I don’t want to, it’s too hard…..it is hard.

Popular culture all too often focuses on the requirement to give something up for lent and for many it comes in the same camp as ‘Movember’, ‘Dry January’ and the very new ‘Veganuary’. However, much of 2020 has seen us giving up many things and 2021 has started in the same vain. We have given up our freedoms to travel, to shop, to attend church, to live life without the fear of infecting or being infected. So, I would like to try and reclaim Lent in 2021 and re-focus on what we can start doing rather than what we should stop doing.

I am not calling for you to give up chips, ice-cream or even chocolate. We have already given up a great deal due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. In Lent 2021 I propose we ‘DO’ rather than ‘Do NOT’.

Do Pray more, Do Talk more, Do Smile more, Do Open Up more, Do Give more, Do Exercise more, Do Listen more, Do Attend Church more (online or in person), Do Play more, Do Care more…And on Valentine’s day….Love More!!!

We all must start somewhere, otherwise we remain scared and static, never growing, never developing. Paul, The Corinthians, Peter, James, John and the rest of the disciples all had to overcome their fears, and although they at times stumbled,….as many of us do in life….all of us do…..and at times we even fail….but it never deterred them….so it should not deter us from seeking to grow in our faith and our love of Christ……remember we are all called to Love our neighbour….so send that text, speak those three short words or say that prayer….and from me to you…You too are loved!

Amen