

### **Setting your Course through “Lent Moments”**

Lent is a time, not just for giving things up, but for doing a review of your life.

Lent arrives just after we have recovered from Christmas. There is a pause in life around now which you can use for Lent-time review.

It is a good Spiritual Practice, part of being a serious disciple of Jesus, to step aside from the path of your life every year and decide what you think about where the path is going.

*Where* are you heading?

Is it where *you want* to be going?

Is it where *God* wants you to be going?

These are some of the questions of Lent.

They can lead you on to others.

Mostly, when we step back and look, we find that the path isn't quite going where we want it to, or where we are happy about it.

So why does it go “astray” like an arrow blown off course, away from the target?

Often the path turns because it meets what seems like an immovable boulder in the way. You get sick. Your job ends. Family realities run into you from the side.

Often the path turns because you find yourself looking for an easier, more pleasant one than the route you seem to be on. Instead of a straight line you deviate, to the Pub, to the comfi chair, to less work and more play, to looking after your own needs first.

There is then a question of evaluating what has led the path to turn.

Those boulders can be just plain reality, and you have to adjust for it. They can also be opportunities for God to lead you into new things and new understandings of yourself and Him.

They can also be times when we just let it slide, or get distracted, or give up believing in the value of getting to the destination.

So you might need to rethink the path.

You may need to bring your back-sliding, or “sin” to confession and re-commitment.

“Sin” is a tricky word, and I always think first of “being naughty”.

But the word “Sin” really refers to whatever weakens or breaks your relationship with God.

Let me give you some examples from the readings provided for today.

The story of Abraham. God calls Abram (he got an extra syllable in his name later) to go to a new land where God will bless him with a huge line of descent. So Abram sets out and follows the path God has set for him. He has lots of exciting adventures and gets progressively older and never has children with his wife Sarai. (who becomes Sarah later). Eventually he just gives up believing that he will have a child with his wife as God had promised. The experience of the vision of flames eventually passing over the sacrifice, (which it appeared God was not accepting) is a strange one, but for Abram it gives him confidence to trust in the God who seemed to be letting him down. Abram could have given up and just settled for being an ordinary prosperous man, but he kept on acting as if he would have a child with his

wife. It was a long while before he ever saw confirmation of that belief. This story marks a *Lent Moment* of affirming the direction of the path, even though it seemed to be leading nowhere.

In the Gospel Jesus has a path set. The way Luke tells the story Jesus' ministry, it is laid out as a long journey to Jerusalem. The journey is Luke's metaphor for the whole unfolding of who Christ is in Jesus. Then one day some of the Pharisees who are friendly to Jesus, come with a warning. They have heard tell of a political assassination plot against him. "Don't go there! There's a trap laid for you!" Now say, for instance, that I was considering running for election as bishop, and someone said to me, "Don't go to the Synod. Someone from the diocesan office is planning to push you out of a window." Well, that would deter me. I would certainly pause, and probably withdraw my name. (Actually, *nothing* could induce me to run for bishop, but that's another story) This is a moment when Jesus, faced with a death threat, must have paused and had a *Lent Moment*. He had set his course to Jerusalem and now here was a big bump in the road. "Should I change course? Back-up? Re-plan?" In the end Jesus decided that he might get smashed on that bump, but onward he would go anyway..... because God and he had agreed on this path, and so it would, somehow, work out well.

In a way Abram had fallen for the *sin* of giving up hope. God's challenge to him, his *Lent Moment*, took him into deep and terrifying darkness where he had to face his despair, his faithlessness and his loss of hope. But in the end he regained determination to believe in the path God had set him on, in spite of evidence to the contrary.

In a way the *sin* of changing the course of his path for Jesus was amply validated by a reasonable desire for self preservation. But Jesus, in his *Lent Moment*, had a grittier attachment to the plan. Where I would have fallen in to that sin, Jesus didn't.

In both cases the change of course is actually a departure from trusting in God. It represents, for Jesus, trusting common sense, rather than the sense of God's will for him. For Abram it represents a slow ebbing away of confidence in God's promise.

When you have been going to church for years, and your relationship with God is stable, and mostly you are getting on with work, and family and creaking joints and paying bills,.... you need to pause. Pause and have review, an overview, a 20,000km spiritual check-up. Whether we have ever written it down or not, or even know we were doing it, we all have a plan of where we want to go, an image of who we want to become, a sense of who and what God has called us to be.

Just as God gives you the direction, there is another force trying to get you to slow down, stop, turn off on a side road or veer away to the west. There is another force trying to get you to part-company with your Father in Heaven. This is the force we call *temptation*.

Lent, as a season of the Church year is not just about weight loss. It is about getting your route plan back. It is about reclaiming the person you know God invites you to become and working to become that person with renewed energy. Lent is about remembering or finding out anew how God sees you with that endless loving gaze of his.

I think, and believe, that just like Jesus did, we need to enter Lent hearing God's voice ringing in our ears as he says to us "You are my beloved child. I am so pleased with you!" And with that in our heads and hearts, looking for *Lent Moments*, the joyful work of Lent begins.

May you have a peaceful and blessed Lent!