

## **Pew Bulletin items:**

### **Ash Wednesday – 22 February, 2012:**

Ash Wednesday commences the liturgical season of Lent. In the life of the early Church, Lent was a period of intense preparation for candidates who would be baptised on Easter Day. The focus of this intense preparation was the Lent Gospel Readings. (They are the Gospel Readings we use for Year A.)

Historically, many people have had a Lenten discipline, such as giving up chocolate or sugar and giving the money saved to the mission of the Church. Others have taken on additional Bible Study or works of mercy.

However, the purpose of any Lenten discipline is to enhance our faith and strengthen our journey with Christ. It also provides an opportunity to support the mission of the Church.

This year's study "Faith Rudder" focuses on how well we are living into our covenant relationship with God. This Ash Wednesday we need to reflect on the front cover of the study booklet and see the potential of each one of these boats, then connect that with our potential to serve God.

Today each person undertaking this Lenten Study is encouraged to establish a Lenten discipline that will make sure the oars are in the rollicks and the engine is in tune so that we can continue to grow in our covenant relationship with God.

A priest friend once said, "If you are not tired at Easter you have not worked hard enough during Lent". Rowing is hard work, even pulling the engine cord is not always easy, but may we pray, reflect and work hard this Lent to grow deeper in our love of Christ and serve Him more faithfully.

Are you ready for this Lenten season?

(277 words)

### **Lent One – 26 February, 2012:**

Television advertisements and many of the programmes we watch encourage us to start with ourselves. In fact some even go further and suggest that you are number one and the important thing is to obtain as much as you can for yourself, so that you will have a fulfilled life.

The overall theme of the Old Testament readings this Lent is living into God's covenants. In examining the readings we note that much of what is common place and regarded as the norm in society today, has been turned upside down.

The covenant with Noah is the first of the covenants recorded in Scripture. The starting point is not Noah or any human being; it is God. God says, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you" (Genesis 9:9) God takes the initiative. God is the starting point.

For Christians, God is our starting point in all aspects of life, not just what we refer to as the "religious parts". God is concerned for our whole life, not just segments. With all of God's covenants we are the beneficiaries, the recipients of God's blessings. For Noah and all who

followed on from Noah, God promised that the world would not be destroyed again by flood. We are reminded of the blessings of God's covenant with Noah each time we see a rainbow.

The liturgical season of Lent calls us to make sure that as we reflect on our lives, our reflection starts with God and not ourselves. Lent is also a time where we examine our lives and repent of those areas of our lives that do not start with God.

Is God the starting in all areas of your life?

(288 words)

### **Lent Two – 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2012:**

What a journey it must have been for Abram and Sarai. They left their home and they did not know the destination. They went forth in faith (Genesis 11:31-12 onwards). God went on to say that Abram would have many descendants. From a human point of view that did not seem possible. However Abram remained faithful to God.

With Abram, as with Noah God takes the initiative in establishing the covenant. God appears to Abram and informs him that as God he is Almighty. Then God says to Abram, "Walk with me, and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1).

Our God is Almighty. We too are called to walk in faith with our God as Abram did.

Because of the covenant between God and Abram, life changed for Abram as it does for us. To show the changed covenant relationship, God changed the names from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah. The name change for Abraham and Sarah signified a change in relationship with God.

Verse 8-14 of chapter 17, are not included in today's reading. In this section, God instructs Abram and his descendants to keep the covenant and circumcision was the mark of the covenant.

The way we live our lives, is evidence of our faith. In my study at home I have a text from David Otis Fuller carved into an old fence post which says, "If you were arrested or being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?" I read it most days and when I read it at night; I often reflect on whether I would be arrested for my Christian life today.

Abraham lived into the covenant with God and was faithful. Is faith our rudder and do we go forth in faith trusting God?

(293 words)

### **Lent Three – 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2012:**

Not long after I was ordained I was celebrating the Eucharist in a small rural town. After I had finished reciting the Ten Commandments and the congregation responded, a couple walked into Church. The community matriarch asked me to stop the service and repeat the commandments. It was an interesting experience, not one I have had before or since. After the service some members of the congregation talked about which commandment the couple should note!

People often view the commandments as ten individual items that we can tick off and say we have fulfilled. At times, I sense some people's aim is to get a pass mark! I want to say this is not the correct way to view the commandments at all.

Yes, each commandment is important in its own right, but each commandment is a part of a whole. The Ten Commandments is one of the key covenants God has made with his people. All Ten Commandments are to be lived into at all times. It is not one commandment now and then another later! All ten make up one covenant in two sections; duty to God and duty to neighbour.

The order is important. As mentioned in Lent 1 it is God who takes the initiative. In the Ten Commandments, serving God is first and because of our love of God and God's love of us we seek to love our neighbour.

Over the years I have heard people comment that the Ten Commandments are "old fashioned". I find them relevant to my life today and without them my life would be the poorer.

So what is the place of the Ten Commandments in your life and are they a part of your faith rudder?

(288 words)

### ***Lent Four – 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2012:***

God is always with us wherever we are in this wonderful world. The question for every Christian is, "Are we always with God?"

The Old Testament reading today is not a covenant. However, it points out the consequences if we move away from God and do not live into God's covenant. I recall a primary school teacher who often said, "Every action has a consequence". The people of God became impatient because things were not working out the way they thought they should.

They went their own way. After some time, they realised that they had sinned. We all sin. But as Christians we address the reality of sin in our lives. So we confess our sin. There are three aspects to confession. First, we say sorry to God for what we have done that is contrary to the will of God or the teachings of Jesus. Second, we seek God's strength to overcome that weakness in our lives. It is important that we acknowledge our sin, but is just as important to address that area of our lives so that we can be more Christ like in the future. Third, we say sorry to those whom we have wronged.

We can confess our sins at any time in any place. Our Sunday worship provides for us an

opportunity to confess our sins. However, it is important that before we come to worship, we reflect on our words and actions and spent time with God so that our confession is meaningful. After we have confessed our sins, we hear that God forgives us. To use the words of one of the Anglican liturgies, "God forgives all who truly repent".

Is prayer and is confession one of the rudders of your faith?

(291 words)

### **Lent Five – 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2012:**

"You can be so earthly minded that you are of no heavenly use; or you can be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly use". This was expression that was used by my father. I don't know who originated it, but this quote continues to shape my life and faith. This expression implies that we should have a balanced approach to our Christian life.

Each time I hear this expression I think of the words in the Letter of James, "So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead" (James 2:17).

As a student in an R.E. class, I recall being told that the longest journey some people will make in life is thirteen inches (or thirty three centimetres); the distance between the head and heart. I remember the clergyperson saying that you can know *about* people with your head; but it is with the heart you really know people and Jesus.

When I was at Divinity School there was a lecturer in Biblical Languages who was an expert in his field. However, the message of the Scriptures had not convinced him of God. I always felt this lecturer was of head and was yet to discover the place of the heart.

We may know about God's covenant in our mind, but we also have to live out God's covenant with our hearts if we are to continue to grow in our faith journey.

God said to the house of Israel, "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33b). As we come to the end of this study, is this text is a reality for you? Is God your rudder in all things?

(282 words)