

A song to sing or to read: Love Will Be Our Lenten Calling

Love will be our Lenten calling
love to shake and shatter sin
waking every closed, cold spirit
stirring new life deep within
till the quickened heart remembers
what our Easter birth can mean.

LOVE

Peace will be our Lenten living
as we turn for home again
longing for the words of pardon
stripping off old grief and pain
till we stand, restored and joyful
with the church on Easter day.

Peace

Truth will be our Lenten learning
hear the Crucified One call!
Shadowed by the Saviour's passion
images and idols fall
and, in Easter's holy splendour
God alone is all in all.

TRUTH

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Closing Prayer

Gracious God how blessed we are to live and serve as a community of your people. Gifted with the beauty of creation surrounding us, lead us into significant relationships that nurture and challenge us, as we experience the promise of life. Make us grateful. Lead us now O God as we seek, in this season of Lent, to journey with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Lead us in righteousness, that our journey might be one in which we embrace Christ's ways of compassion and justice; grace and mercy; hope and right living. Lead us in peace, God, as we seek to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Amen

With thanks to Dan Eaton for preparing today's reflection



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Church in a Bag
Sunday 21 February

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering – Psalm 25

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, for in you I trust, O my God.
Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies' triumph over me.
For those whose hope lies with you there is no shame.
There is no excuse given to those that turn from you.
Show me your ways, O Lord, and lead me on your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are my Saviour God.
My hope is with you for all days.
Remind us of your unending mercy
and love.
Relieve me from my wrongful ways and
thoughts that turn from you.
Remember me according to your love...
Remember me, for you are good, O Lord.
Amen



Preparation

This day marks the first Sunday of the Lenten season, a period of reflection leading up to the events of Holy Week; the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. These are the two seasons of the church that form the basis of our relationship with God.

Purple is the colour of Lent – symbolic for royalty and yet, repentance. Lent is a time of lament and yet, hope and promise. The Lenten texts to Easter will invite us to explore God's Covenants, hinting and leaning toward the boldest, greatest, most daring promise of all – the forgiveness of sins and salvation through faith.

This season begins with a promise and also ends with promise: from rainbows to resurrection to spirit-filled lives. We are empowered to serve and reveal to mankind God's love for the world.

Reading: 1 Peter 3:18–22

Reflection

The perception is that Lent is a time to ‘Give up something’. This is odd, for faith and a Jesus-filled life are really about “Taking Up”, not self-denial. It is self-giving that makes a difference. How about for the next 40 days, each of us commit to the following:

Take up giving thanks for everything. Regular grumbling, moaning, groaning, and complaining are hardly Christian disciplines.

Take up 15 minutes to be with your faith. Use these few minutes of no time for prayer, Bible study and personal devotion. A few minutes of each will keep you focussed.

Take up viewing others on their best points not their worst attributes. We all have faults. It is a lot easier to have people overlook our shortcomings when we overlook theirs first.

Take up speaking kindly. Check that sharp tongue at the door. Let your speech be generous and understanding. It costs so little to say something kind and uplifting or to offer a smile.

Take up tolerance for hatred or dislike. Redouble your efforts in the discipline of love.

Take up a relaxed attitude to challenges, worries or anxieties. They're too heavy for you to carry anyway. Instead, trust God with them. Live each day for what it is and let God's grace be sufficient.

Take up a media-free evening. Instead, visit someone who's lonely or sick; those who are isolated by illness or age. Why isolate yourself electronically? Give someone a precious gift: your time!

Take up spending less on yourself. Instead, give the money to God. The money you would spend on the “little extras” could help someone meet their most basic needs. We're called to be stewards of God's riches, not sole consumers.

Take up a daily opportunity of demonstrating “What would Jesus Do?” by our interactions with everyone we encounter. How better said than that in the words of St Francis... “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words”.

Reading: Mark 1:9–15

Reflection

Mark's Gospel has no nativity story nor “life before” Jesus takes up his ministry. The first lines are about the Baptism of Jesus...that very same baptism that marks our own journey with Jesus. Baptism is our response of faith. It shows where our allegiance lies. It acknowledges that we are seeking to live a new life in Christ. It is the very basis of our connection to the comfort and peace we have with God.

Consider this story of a lost swimmer. As he was paddling at a leisurely pace about a hundred metres offshore, a freak evening fog rolled in across the water. Suddenly he could see nothing: no horizon, no landmarks, no objects or lights on shore. Because the fog diffused all light, he could not even make out the direction of the setting sun.

The swimmer splashed about in absolute panic. He would start off in one direction, lose confidence, and turn 90 degrees to the right. Or left – it made no difference which way he turned. He could feel his heart racing uncontrollably. He would stop and float, trying to conserve energy and force himself to breathe slower. Then he would blindly strikeout again. At last, he heard a faint voice calling from shore. He pointed his body to the sounds and followed them to safety. Can you imagine the sheer joy of the lost swimmer?

Today is the Sunday in the year when the church intentionally remembers that it needs to get all wet in the amazing grace-filled waters of our baptism in Jesus Christ. We become drenched, gloriously dripping wet; soaked in him to whom we are accountable and by whom we are all saved.

