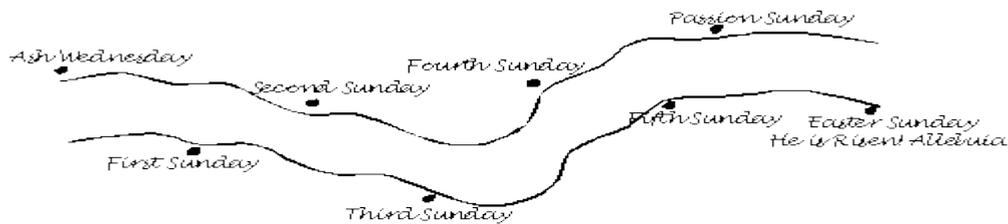


Week 33: February 10th



Ash Wednesday

Years ago when I was in Guiding, I remember having to clear away the ashes of the campfire of the previous evening. There was this heap of grey ashes on the ground and I scooped them up in my hands to put them on the compost heap and that was when I realised that they were still very hot! I burnt my hands quite badly and the blisters were very painful. Those dead looking ashes were anything but! I was deceived by their dullness into thinking that there was no life in them at all.

Next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent, 40 days of reflection, prayer, repentance and either giving up or taking on an extra task. This is a gift of time given by the church to contemplate what it meant and means for Jesus to walk the way of the Cross.

On the Sunday before Ash Wednesday in some Christian traditions, the Palm Crosses of the previous year are brought back to church burnt and then ground into ashes which are used in the Ash Wednesday Service, when a sign of the cross is made on the forehead of those who come forward with a reminder that our life on earth is a gift given to us and that from dust we came and from dust we shall return.

In Godly Play when we look at Lent, we are reminded that we have four weeks in Advent to prepare for Christmas and Six weeks for Lent to prepare for Easter, so maybe the message of Easter is one we need more time to understand. If Christmas reminds us that God so loved the world he sent his Son, then Easter reminds us that God's love was outpoured on the Cross for each of us.

I wonder where you are spiritually today? *Is the word of God in you alive and kicking and sharper than a two edged sword* (Hebrews 4:12), - that's great, I hope you have a really fruitful Lent and walk the way of the cross in a way that brings you close to God. Or perhaps you feel a bit like the ashes of a fire, tired, lacking energy and struggling to cope - because if it is this, then take heart, the fire of God still burns in you and it will only take a small movement towards him to get the spark alight again. Ashes are great compost so if that is where you are then it is good ground for the seed of God's love to begin to grow again.

If you read these thoughts regularly, then we will be walking the way of the cross through Lent together. Sometimes the fire of our thoughts and emotions will be fierce within us and other times it will be like the ashes and it will be hard to stay in there, but we have the promise that God is with us no matter how we feel.

Holy and life giving God, we come to you as we begin our journey towards the cross. Help us to stay faithful in our devotions, diligent in our study and hopeful in our inner beings that when we get to Easter we will be able to know afresh the magnitude of your love for each one of us. Amen