

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT YEAR A

1. If only we could have what we want: a bigger home, a better car, more food, a more well-paid job, grander holidays, more entertainment, the latest mobile phone etc. Advertisements and peer pressure are often blamed for our desires, but we ourselves are responsible for succumbing to our greed. A survey recently reported that many teenagers want to be celebrities. Not satisfied with their own lives they seek popularity, exposure and flashiness. And we see the temptation of power in politics, in business, in local organizations, and in families. Power struggles—to be in charge, to be boss cocky, to have one's own way, to have others give in to you—are evident in many spheres of our lives. Greed, self-centredness and misuse of power! This shadow-side of humanity is the focus for Lent 1.

2. Adam's story is Everyman's story. Adam and Eve occupy a distinctive place in creation, in the garden with everything they need, but it is not enough for them. They seek their own satisfaction, attractive fruit, and the wisdom of God. They choose their own way. The story indicates we are basically responsible for our own plight. We make choices which conflict with the purpose God had in creation for us. We cannot blame God or the evil one for our plight.

3. As Adam began the story of fallen humanity, characterized by sin and death, so Christ began a new story characterized by forgiveness, righteousness and life. Jesus' decided to put the temptations of his hunger, his popularity and his power aside and stay reliant on God. He chose a different pathway, one which would lead to abundant life, not death a path dependent on God who had placed us first in the centre of his creation. Paul in Romans parallels Adam and Christ who is the second Adam, but this time in the right relationship with God. Through Christ, Everymanwoman can be on the path to life.

4. Perhaps it is easier to accept the fallenness of humanity when we look at a world of poverty, racism, war, pollution and so on, the outcomes of greed, self-centredness and misuse of power. It is sometimes hard to see that Christ has brought a new way, and a path to restoration of humanity. Even in the Church the brokenness of our lives is still evident. To the non-believer the world may seem to be still in the image of Adam. But to Christians, 'the second Adam' has come and offers us a better way. By ourselves we cannot achieve our own redemption but, in his grace and in his time, God will work his purpose out for all humankind.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT YEAR A

1. You may recall the National Church Life Survey asking if your faith had grown in the last year. What a difficult question! It makes me want to ask in return, 'What is faith?' One definition is "Faith is the obedient response to the call of God", not a passive quality but an action which provides a channel for the redemptive action of God. Paul (Romans 4.1-5, 13-17) presents Abraham as our Father in Faith since he responded to God's call to step out in faith as the founder of the people of God. The covenant with God is made. Abraham goes in faith from his father's house and country to become a new nation, the people of God, and in return they have the promise of God's blessing.
2. Nicodemus (John 3.1-17) came at night to speak to Jesus, stepping out of his spiritual blindness, out of the darkness of the Sanhedrin's opposition to Jesus. In a way, his action was an act of faith., responding to the call to seek the truth. Yet he struggles to accept Jesus' answers to his questions about the kingdom of God. He has trouble believing in things not seen (Paul's definition of faith' (Hebrews 11.1) We know little of Nicodemus's response but we learn later that he spoke up in defence of Jesus in the Sanhedrin, and joined Joseph of Arimathea in preparing the body of Jesus for burial and giving generously of the burial spices. In secret, yes, but still an action in the great story of redemption.
3. The gospel writer adds his own commentary. He looks back on the saving act of Christ sent by God to act in the world, in history. The sight of Christ lifted on the cross has the power to bring people to faith, and that faith shows itself in the actions of repentance and reparation, a turning to Christ and to love of God and neighbour in the world. The death of Jesus on the cross is an action of divine love, itself a stepping out into the world with redemptive love.
4. In the cross, God is calling each of us to faith, together to be his people. God calls us to respond by stepping out of our darkness, stepping out to seek the truth, stepping out to become a follower, to speak in Jesus defence, to give what we can for the continuing action of the redemption of the world. He calls each of us to see faith not as a passive quality but one which requires action. What is it that God is calling you to do in faith?

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT YEAR A

1. We know only too well the need for water, what it is to thirst; the desperation of Riverland fruit-growers denied access to irrigation water; the gradual death of gardens not watered; the plight of those in the outback of those who fail to carry enough water; the longing for clean water supplies in Asian villages.
2. So we can understand the emotion of the Israelites deprived of water—the quarrels, the anger, the questioning (testing) of God (Exodus 17.1-7) Desperate, powerless people, not knowing how to get out of their predicament, begin to blame and resent those around them. Yet God knows their need. He is there ahead of them, ready to provide for them. The rock needs only to be struck in faith.
3. Jesus comes ahead of the woman to the well. (John 4.5-42) A very ambiguous and strange conversation takes place, the woman thinking quite literally about the bucket and the depth of the well; Jesus speaking metaphorically about the water he can give, giving a profound promise of eternal life. (v.14) (cf the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus),
4. Today we pray, "O God. The fountain of life, ...". We live in a parched world where people long for the living water of Christ. It is easy to recognise in those who seek meaning in life through drugs and alcohol and riotous living, but perhaps more insidious is the search for happiness in constant shopping sprees, in the vicarious enjoyment gained through the lives of celebrities, in the obsession with getting more and more money and goods, in seeking popularity and power There's the sadness of those who find no meaning in family and friends and daily work, in the depression of seeing oneself as a loser, and living as pointless. In Christ we have the source of life. Through him we can receive forgiveness, like the Samaritan woman, for the things of the past which weigh us down. Through him we learn of God's love for each of us. He is the one to restore our self esteem, the one to calm our anger, the one to fill us with living water.
5. God goes ahead of us as he was in the desert, as Jesus was at the well. He knows everything we have ever done. He knows our thirst and hunger for love and acceptance and forgiveness and recognition and for whatever stops us living life abundantly. Turn to him and drink from the well, have faith to strike the Rock so the water can flow!