

Dear Friends,

The first day of this quarter coincides with Ash Wednesday (1 March). While the 40 days of Lent recall the time that Jesus spent in the wilderness, Lent is really a penitential season. That means it is a time of solemn reflection to bring our lives more into line with how God would have us live. The idea of giving up something for Lent is a remnant from the time when many Christians took the observance of Lent a lot more seriously than we do today, with fasting and prayer. While giving up something for Lent is not necessarily a bad thing, our spiritual practices ought to run rather deeper than that.

The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) give some importance to the final journey that Jesus took from Caesarea Philippi (in the north) down through Galilee and on to Jerusalem. Spiritually, the season of Lent gives us the opportunity to follow that journey. If you committed yourself to reading half a chapter of one of the synoptic Gospels each day you would more or less be reading the Easter Story at Easter. Perhaps that is something I could encourage you all to do.

I hope that every Methodist member who is able to do so will attend a service on Good Friday. The wonder of the Good Friday message is not simply that Jesus died 'for the world' but that he died 'for me'. The great Good Friday hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* captures the personal nature of the Cross and Passion, and the demands that following Jesus make on our lives.

Easter Day is the high point of the church's year. The amazing message that Jesus not only died but also rose again has been exciting and challenging people for 2,000 years. The resurrection narratives in the Gospels are precious scriptures for all believers. Some time spent at home in the days after Easter reading through the gospel accounts of Jesus appearing to his followers will be time well spent.

As the quarter draws to a close we have Aldersgate Sunday (21 May) and Wesley Day (24 May). These are times when we remember the evangelical conversion of John and Charles Wesley, founders of the modern Methodist movement. However, this is not something of merely historic interest. Methodists have always believed that the faith and assurance of salvation experienced by the Wesley brothers can be ours too. This is something of our heritage that we can share with other denominations. Consequently, we are holding a circuit and ecumenical service at Paignton Parish Church on Wednesday 24 May at 7.30 pm, which I hope will be a fitting climax to a journey begun at the beginning of Lent.

God bless

*John Haley*