

## **LENT: A TIME FOR GROWTH AND NEW LIFE**

The season of Lent can seem a very depressing time. We think of it as a time during which we sit in sackcloth and ashes and mourn our sins; a time to give up chocolate or red wine, or whatever we like best. It can seem very solemn, full of gloom and doom, not something we need in a world so full of doom and gloom, without Lent adding to it..

But Lent need not be that. You will not find the word Lent in the Bible. It originated in the church over some centuries. The word literally means "spring" or "lengthening" when the days get longer, though in the southern hemisphere, it is the other way round. And spring is a time of new life when the blossoms come out; when the leaves start to cover the trees; when the sun (hopefully) shines more and the mornings are lighter.

How can we make Lent a meaningful time, a time which prepares us for Good Friday and Easter? Perhaps you find giving up chocolate works for you as a discipline. But what does it mean? I gave up giving up something for Lent long ago, because it made no sense. If you gave up chocolate, you might think of putting the money you would have spent on it, aside and giving it to a charity. Or we might think of giving up for good, things that are very hard to give up: our prejudices, grudges, bigotry, etc. And perhaps instead of giving something up, we could take on something more: spending more time in personal devotions, taking time to attend a Lent course and/or a Holy Week programme. We could spend more time befriending those who are lonely: a visit, a phone call, a text. We could spend time volunteering with a local charity or becoming involved in picking up litter with a community group. The possibilities are endless, but it amounts to giving up some of our free time in the service of God and others.

And yes, it is true that Lent is about repentance. But the word literally means a turning around: a change of heart and a change of mind. This is much harder than simply confessing our sins; it requires of us a change in the way we think about ourselves, our attitudes to others; how we think about church and our discipleship.

All the ministers in the circuit will offer opportunities for growth and new life during Lent. It is up to all of us to take these opportunities for our personal benefit and for that of our community. The journey to the cross and ultimately to the resurrection is hard work, but it is worthwhile work. I pray that for all of us, Lent will be a time of growth and new life in Christ.

*Revd Dr Lynita Conradie*