



During this “**Rooted in...**” series we are reminding ourselves of the core attributes in the Christian DNA. Our root system has at its centre, covenant. From covenant comes other secondary & tertiary roots, such as encouragement, prayer, fasting & love. Last Wednesday began the new season of Lent, a 40-day period where there are many opportunities for spiritual growth attributed to another root: **SACRIFICE**.

The Old Covenant had at its centre a complex sacrificial system, where an array of offerings were made to take away sins. In John 1:29 John saw Jesus & said, “*Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” The New Covenant is made by Christ’s sacrifice. Romans 3:25a “*God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed His life, shedding His blood*”. Hebrews 9 completes the picture of the amazing grace & mercy shown to us by the Lord Jesus by

saying, “*¹²Christ did not enter by means of the blood of goats & calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood & secured our redemption forever... ¹⁵Christ is the mediator of the new covenant*”. Lent reminds us that we are rooted in sacrifice!

As some people give up or do without various things, the objective is to reflect on Christ’s sacrifice. In the giving up of comfortable things, and the clearing of the clutter of our lives we encounter a little pain that in some way enables us to draw closer to God and to see Him more clearly. Whilst many Christians over many years have used this as a way to prepare for the forthcoming Easter season, Lent is not observed by all Christians, which is okay. There is nowhere in the Bible that specifically forbids it nor that promotes it. It can though be a good opportunity to reflect on our own spiritual journey, laying

before God our burdens, heartaches & repenting of sins & hindrances in our life, in preparation for entering into the story of easter again. It is as we sacrifice something that we are reminded daily of the need to die to self, and that anticipates our renewed life in the future.

Sacrifice requires discipline & calls us to think beyond ourselves & our immediate wants. In Matthew 9:13 Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea 6:6 & says, “*Go & learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’*.” The word here for *mercy* is the same as for *love*. God is saying that whilst He sees our outer appearances & efforts, it really is the inner heart that is crucial. He wants us to open our hearts to Him again by the power of His Holy Spirit. As I have said before in this series, **the key thing is the attitude of the heart**. Commentator DA Carson observes, “this indicates that God’s priority is costly [sacrificial] love rather than careful ritual”. God doesn’t mind what we choose to sacrifice this Lent, but He does mind the condition of our heart. Psalm 51:17 “*The sacrifice God desires is a broken spirit. He will not reject a broken & repentant heart*”.

In the UK this year the top 5 things that people are giving up for Lent are: 1 Chocolate. 2 Social Networking. 3 Alcohol. 4 Twitter. 5 Facebook. Others include meat, sweets & fizzy drinks. These might be good to sacrifice, but it would be much more profound if we focus on our hearts & choose to sacrifice some of our deep-seated ingrained attitudes or desires & then to refocus on the needs of others.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer speaking re the UK’s potential economic recovery post-covid, made a great point that applies equally to Lent, “**Where people have been through sacrifice... they want a better future**”. Our “better future” comes from Christ’s sacrificial death which through faith we are beneficiaries of. When our sacrifices are from the heart, we will live changed & inspired lives that truly reflect Jesus’ sacrificial love for us & for our communities.

Ruth has already emailed out various resources for Lent. Here is another one from BUGB, and an excellent book of reflections that I have used from Joyce Huggett. I have included her opening prayer



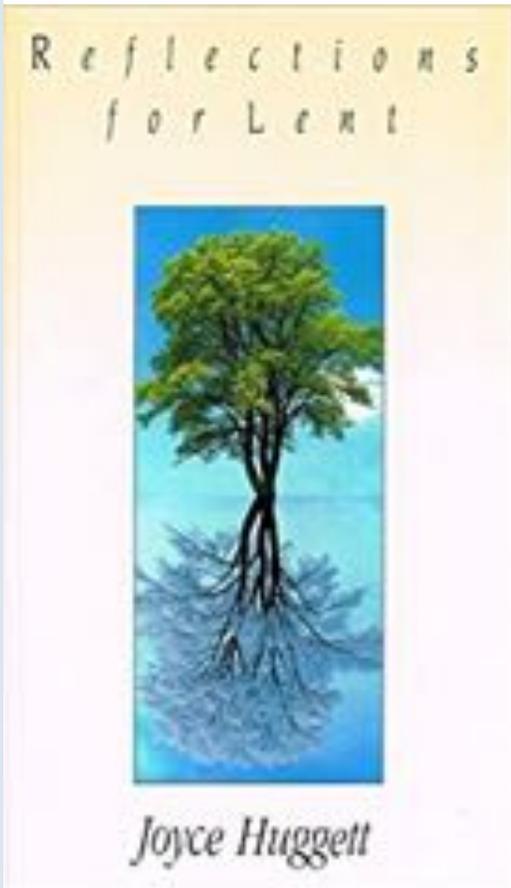
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Father, thank you. Although I come to you sin-stained and weary, hopelessly handicapped by my own failures, I know you do not want me to nurse a sense of guilt or inferiority but rather to shed my burden so that I can be released and cleansed from it. Here and now, I lay that burden at the foot of your cross. There I leave it as I go to make amends for the hurt I have caused..... and..... May I love them with your pure and reconciling love.

Lord,
You come to me
You touch me
You wipe away my tears
You smile at me
Embrace me
You iron out my fears
Thank you.