

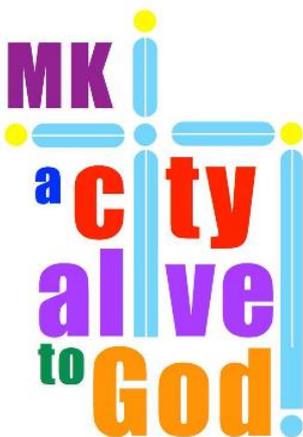


Mission Partnership Newsletter
March 2020

Dear Friends,

We come to another Lent: time to give up chocolate, promise to be a better person, perhaps pray and feel virtuous, join a “Lent group”. I wonder if the prophet Joel, who usually only gets a look in on Ash Wednesday, would have seen it that way? “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, a day of darkness and gloom!” begins the traditional Ash Wednesday reading. Joel will have nothing to do with a politely sanitised Lent. If we are to deal with the living God, then superficiality has no place. God is not interested in a little light dusting of our religious furniture, a reordering of the spiritual house: he comes to blow the house down, to demand that we begin again. What Joel points us towards is the sense that even our very best, heartfelt and honest attempts to engage with God, our most courageous discipleship, is touched by pride, self-deception, a thousand mixed motivations, the inescapable mindset that the Bible calls sin. There is nothing to be done but to begin again, all that we might call our spiritual maturity, so much dust and ash before the fire of the living God. Beginning again is a call to “return to God with all your heart...rend your hearts and not your garments”. We rend our hearts that we might be open to the grace and steadfast love of God. We have to build from the foundations with a new seriousness: Ash Wednesday is nothing less than a complete spiritual reset.

This is important, because where our spiritual life is lacking, the rumour of God dies out. Where it is real, vibrant, authentic the question of God confronts the world. Insofar as our culture asks derisively, as it did in Joel’s day “Where is your God?” our response must be the recovery and revitalisation of that spiritual reality in our own lives which silences the derision and turns the question from mocking to a genuine search for the living God. Without a vital spiritual life, mission cannot get out of the starting blocks.



Signs of that authentic spiritual reality are to be found in the kinds of initiative we are celebrating in our **Mission Fair on 21st March at the Church Centre in Water Eaton**, initiatives which spring from faith and seek to make a difference in the world. Come along and get inspired! They are to be found as well in the **ROC (Redeeming our Communities) conversations** happening across the city at the moment as we explore ways of working in partnership with all sorts of organisations in the public and voluntary sectors. But above all they are to be found in our daily discipleship and the life of prayer which undergirds it. So this Ash Wednesday, hear the words of Joel and press your spiritual reset button.

Every Blessing,
John