

February 2018



Dear Friends,

On 14th February, St Valentine's Day. Lent starts with Ash Wednesday. As I have said many times before I am not a great fan of 'giving up things for Lent'- like sweets chocolates etc. Instead I am much keener on 'taking something up' positively for Lent- and the Church of England has a website called "Live Lent" where some good ideas on how to make a positive difference in lent can be found – its tagline this lent is "let your light shine."

However, one thing that I am shocked about in our public discourse is the lack of respect shown in our media, and especially our social media, towards people who happen to have a different view. The former "The Apprentice winner and now TV pundit Michelle Dewberry was appalled by the language used on both sides of the Brexit/Remain debate and said recently on Twitter:

"I've said it before & I'll say it again...I despair the way so many people lack the ability to RESPECTFULLY disagree. It is OK for people to have a different view. Why attack/silence when that happens? Not everybody needs to think the same way. Life would be boring if we did."

I heartily agree with this and I echo the atheist philosopher Voltaire when he said:

"I may not agree with what you are saying, but I will defend with my life your right to say it".

It is my view that our true character is shown, not just in the acts of kindness that we do, everyone can come over as benevolent when they are doing something charitable, but also in the way we handle disagreement and conflict. Conflict is inevitable because God has made us to be different, but the desire to be '**in the right**' and prove others to be '**in the wrong**' is very strong; it has been shown right throughout the bible and even the disciples were guilty of this. **(Mark 9:33-34)** Our faith is, we believe, the truth but if we put our point of view across in a way that makes others feel they are our inferiors, morally or intellectually, then we are not behaving as Jesus would want us to. As my Mum and Dad used to say, "**Sometimes there is a wrong way of being right**". Jesus himself showed the true leadership in John 13:1-7, when we washed the disciples' feet and acted as the lowest servant, and he himself taught us;

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

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This does not mean that we are to be 'doormats' and crumple when anyone puts a view different to ours, far from it, but it does mean that we should, as Peter says:

"Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

So perhaps, this Lent, as well as taking up something positive and giving up other things, we can also commit ourselves to being courteous and gentle in our dealings with others, being straight, honest and fair in what we say, so that, as Paul says, we give no offence except that of the offence of the cross. People can get offended with the claims of Jesus, for accepting Him and His words mean that the hearer must submit their lives to Him and that causes offence to those unwilling to do so, but that should be the only offence we are guilty of.

Let us use this song as a prayer this Lent.

**God forgave my sin in Jesus' name,
I've been born again in Jesus' name;
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me to.**

**All power is given in Jesus' name,
In earth and heaven in Jesus' name;
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His power as He told me to.**

***He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received,
Freely, freely give;
Go in My name, and because you believe
Others will know that I live.'***

In Christian love,

Paul