

## A Season of Penitence

Lent is a strange idea for Christians. A “penitential season”, when we are encouraged to examine ourselves thoroughly for every lapse, even though we should know full well that God’s mercies and forgiveness are new every day, and that our sins are cast as far from us as the east is from the west. A season of self-discipline, even though the whole Christian life should be that. (Although maybe the secular “dry January” or “veganuary” are replacing Lent in that respect in our world today.) A season of prayer and Bible study, when those things should be our daily or at least weekly staple. A time to walk “the way of the cross”, when that is really just another name for the Christian life. A time when we refrain from over-indulgence, which we shouldn’t be doing anyway. In short, a forty-day period in which we call ourselves to live as Christians.

Of course there is great value in Lent too. A focussed season with more time and energy consciously directed to prayer, study, discussion, self-examination, serving others, finding ways to follow Christ in our own lives and communities. A time to challenge ourselves, encourage others, and seek God. A time to support each other in self-discipline without advertising it to the world. A time to rethink our commitments, our volunteering, our calling as disciples.



I encourage you this Lent, not to give things up (other than things you should give up whether it is Lent or not), but to consider what you might take on (not just for Lent, but longer-term): supporting a neighbour in some way, volunteering in church or in the community, regular Bible study, joining a group of some sort, giving regularly to a good cause, a regular daily prayer slot, a new habit of saying Thank You to someone each day ... write your own list and choose one or two items that will help you walk with Jesus.

God bless you this Lent.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+Donald  
Bishop of Peterborough