

Vicar's letter – March 2020 'Set me on Fire'

Dear friends

I'm sure you, like me, feel for those in communities around the country whose homes and businesses have been affected by the recent flood waters. The distress for those whose homes have been repeatedly flooded in recent weeks arouses our sympathy and compassion.

Rivers and waterways have their natural channels which, from age to age, have guided this source of life-giving provision across our natural landscape. In times past the economy prospered through the canal networks and the transportation of goods. Rivers provide a place for recreation and leisure, for fun and enjoyment, when they flow within their defined boundaries.

However, when those boundaries are breached and the natural channels can no longer contain the volume of water then we see the devastation that flooding can cause.

What we experience in the physical, we can understand in the spiritual. Looking across the landscape of our national life we can see the impact on society when the natural channels of God's moral laws for human flourishing to guide us and keep us safe are no longer observed. Ignoring God's ways and living as if sin and selfishness are of no account causes untold damage in the lives of us all. It's as if the God given channels that provide good boundaries for how we live in relationship with one another are breached and the result is brokenness and distress on so many different levels.

Lent – a season of reflection

This week on Ash Wednesday we began the season of Lent. It is an opportunity for sober reflection; a time to think, consider and repent. We allow the Holy Spirit to examine us, to reveal to us where we have allowed sin and selfishness to burst the banks of holy living, falling short of God's requirement of us. It is a time to take responsibility for our part in spoiling God's good creation and consider how we can take steps to restore what is broken.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

We are not alone in this time of reflection. God has given to us his *Holy Spirit* to guide us, convict us and lead us to repentance, so that we might grow in holiness, purity and love.

Acts 5:32 reminds us that the Holy Spirit is given 'to those who obey him'. So how can we resolve to live in constant obedience to God observing his laws and living within the boundaries of his grace?

'Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in the holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.' Psalm 24:3,4

God calls us to be a holy people, who stand in the 'holy place' and intercede for our nation, that the name of Jesus might be honoured. Human flourishing is most fruitful when living within the boundaries defined by the One who created us.

'Set me on Fire'

In Malcolm Macdonald's book of this title he comments that no revival ever happened without God's people being fervent in prayer leading to repentance. If we want to see the 'flood waters' return to their natural channels so that human flourishing and the health of society might be restored, then it begins with prayer.

Prayers during Lent

In the Church Foyer each week day (Mon – Fri) at 12 noon, we shall be gathering for half an hour of prayer. If you are going shopping or coming into town, why not plan to do so around this prayer time and build it into your schedule?

For those who are not able to join us, why not resolve to pray more intentionally during Lent. For example, it may be choosing not to turn on the car radio in the morning but observe the silence and invite God to speak to you in it. It may be going for a quiet walk at lunchtime and be still in God's presence, using the time to pray. It may be setting an alarm on your phone for midday and pausing to invite Jesus into your day. Building in these rhythms of prayer into the activity of our day can help us to keep connected to God and attentive to his voice.

Prayer: 'Lord may Your Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven'. Amen

Your friend in Christ

Stephen