

Treasures in Lent

This image of discarded empty bottles was first taken and used in our New Year reflection – pausing to consider the messages and challenges that might be contained in this mountain of post-Christmas refuse. As we enter the season of Lent, it continues to speak. The traditional idea of Shrove Tuesday was to self-indulge, use up your leftover goodies and after discarding the empties, be prepared for a season of moderation and self-sacrifice.

Traces of that tradition remain, as Christians and members of broader society will often speak of what they are “giving up for Lent”. In our 21st Century, many have claimed this as an opportunity to “fast” from Social Media and technology and the inevitable stresses and anxieties that seem to come with it. However we choose to mark it today, the idea of a “Lenten Fast” is to help Christians focus more fully on the events and meaning of Jesus’ journey to the cross – time to step back from the comings, goings and self-indulgences of everyday life and to consider afresh what really matters.

So another way of thinking about Lent might not be so much to ask each other “what are you planning to give up?” but rather “What will you make space to focus on during this season?”



This year, we have offered as a focus for our shared life as North West Baptists, the words of St. Paul to the Corinthian Christians “we have a treasure in jars of clay”. Through this we have recognised our own fragility, and the fragility and struggles of those with who we share our Christian journey. It has called us to look for the treasure within those whose potential might otherwise be too easily overlooked.

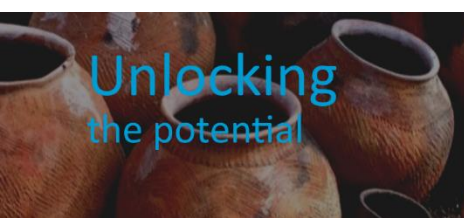
And as we make our journey through Lent, our thoughts will inevitably turn, as Christian communities, to how we share the core messages of Holy Week and Easter in a society that still retains some recognition of their underlying narratives. Plans may already be in place for shared acts of witness with other Christian communities; perhaps we will be anticipating a larger than usual congregation on Easter Day; we might be working with local schools or other community groups to lay on some special events and holiday initiatives.

These are just a few examples of the creative and committed approaches to mission that it is my privilege to witness and occasionally share in across our Baptist community. But without diminishing any of that, let’s also remember that the core treasures of our Christian message lie in the message itself, not the imaginative and creative ways that we use to share it.

We have to acknowledge that if our effectiveness depends solely on our ability to compete with the resources and marketing strategies of our contemporary world, we are going to struggle. Our Easter services will be offered alongside the “*Stunning Easter Offers*” at the local DIY superstore and the “*Gripping New Dramas*” that the big broadcasters will be looking to make the “must see” events of the Bank Holiday Weekend. Our efforts are likely to look and feel like clay jars in a shop full of porcelain china.

So let’s see those clay jars for what they are, defined not as an end in themselves but by the treasure that is contained within. Perhaps this season of Lent can help us strip away the wrappings and recognise the treasures that we really do have to offer. The Corinthian Christians, to whom Paul first wrote these words, were also struggling to compete, but they were reminded that amidst the challenges that they faced, that they were the repository of God’s treasure. So we may never be the hottest venue in town, but we can be the most welcoming; we may not be the most glamorous community to be part of, but we can be the most authentic; we may not be able to answer every question and conundrum that life throws our way, but with God’s help, we can reflect the presence of Christ amidst our struggles. For within the clay jars of our shared life, God’s treasure remains present.

Phil Jump – NWBA Regional Minister – March 2020



Unlocking
the potential

“We have this treasure in jars of clay” 2 Cor 4:7

NWBA
North Western
Baptist Association