

John 8:1-11

¹ while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' ¹¹ She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

Sermon: Address your spiritual core! Revd David Treharne

Over the last couple of years I've been doing some work on my core muscles... you know, those deep muscles that help our balance and provide stability and support to the pelvis, spine, back, hips and tummy.

Weak core muscles are a cause of back pain and can give a person issues with balance, strength, stamina and stability. Continuing to work hard on my core with various exercises will hopefully continue to help my back pain, give me better balance, strength and stamina and it may help in strong winds when it's a struggle to stay on one's feet!

As I have worked on my physical core spiritual parallels are really interesting and rather important. Just as having a healthy physical core is vital to wellbeing, so having a healthy spiritual core is just as vital to our wellbeing and our ability to cope with what happens in life.

The Bible talks about standing firm in our faith (e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:13, Philippians 4:1), enduring hardships and suffering (2 Corinthians 6:3-5), remaining steadfast under trial (James 1:12) and persevering in running the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1). We will struggle to do any of this if our spiritual core is weak... stamina, strength and stability will not be there... we'll potentially be blown away. How am I to battle against sin (Hebrews 12:4) and resist the devil (1 Peter 4:1-5:14) and not become weary of doing good (Galatians 6:9) if my spiritual core is feeble? How will I cope with life's storms, war, persecution, suffering, challenge?

Lent is a time when the state of our inner spiritual core is revealed for what it is... the sin, the weakness the motivations, desires, passions, values and beliefs. Where we realise how we have been blown off course, or how easily we could be blown off course in life and in faith.

Like the woman in the gospel reading who has the state of her life, her inner core publicly exposed before a crowd having committed adultery... and hauled before Jesus, so we also are hauled up before Jesus... rumbled.

Or perhaps like the self righteous crowd who press in on the woman with disapproval, anger, blame, rejection, disparagement, condemnation and intent to kill... as their core, their sin, their hearts are also revealed in the presence of Jesus... so our hearts are revealed.

But Lent is not a time of retribution and condemnation... yes, it is a time of very honest revelation and appraisal of our inner core, but it is a time when naked and exposed before Jesus we are faced with the opportunity for our lives to be different, our hearts to be changed, our core to be transformed... strengthened... and our relationship with God, with each other and with the world to be different. We take steps with God and with each other to address our spiritual core... the things that are weak, destructive & unholy, hurting, things that need to change... things that need to be transformed for our own wellbeing.

Lent is not a time for listening to the destructive voices of disapproval, anger, blame, rejection, disparagement, condemnation and death. It is a time when we hear and obey the voice of Jesus; the voice of mercy, hope, forgiveness and love; the voice of kindness and peace, the voice of truth... go and sin no more, the voice of change, transformation and new beginnings... and to hear and know and absorb the beauty of divine life and love afresh... right to the core of our being.

The season of Lent should not been seen as a chore... but as a gift of God... a special time of grace and opportunity for transformation.

The 40 days... in the Bible is always special...

- a period of preparation for some special action of the Lord;
- a time of grace, or a time when God does things.
- A time of change; It can be a paradigm shift.

Major things can happen in 40 days... including a change in the state of our spiritual core.

And as for strengthening that spiritual core...

1. **Be honest** with yourself and with God about the flaws and failings... stop the blagging and avoidance
2. **Listen to the Doctor's voice and instructions...** not lies and misinformation! As well as hearing God's voice and being defined by it, we need Jesus, the Doctor of Life, to diagnose the best course of treatment action for a healthy spiritual core. Some of the advice might be quite painful or unwanted. Spiritual exercises and practices, whilst beneficial and life giving, aren't always easy. Gathering as church, prayer, fasting, bible reading and financial giving aren't always a bundle of joy, sweetness and light! Trusting God and letting him have our hearts can be challenging. Undertaking a Lenten practice can be like being told you need to do press ups or sit ups! Something we perhaps don't really want to do... but something that deep down is necessary for wellbeing and transformation and life. Some of us might initially only be able to make small adjustments and starter spiritual exercises in our lives... just

like with our physical core. Trying to read the whole bible in a month or fast for 3 days can be like trying to run 5K when you haven't run for 5 years! A cause of injury and distress not wellbeing.

3. **Allow God to work in us.** Let go and let God. Co-operate with the one who can change and transform us.
4. **There's something about motivation** – you've got to want to do it and have some discipline
5. **Accountability...** we go on this Lenten journey together, not alone, encouraging one another, supporting, praying for one another. This Lent is an opportunity for us all to learn how to be God's people once again echoing Jesus' voice and actions with one another. Let us learn how to love one another, forgive one another, live in peace with one another, pray for one another, be hospitable to one another, be accountable to one another and recognise one another for who we are in Christ... reaffirming our core identity as God's beloved children and echoing Jesus' voice of mercy, hope, forgiveness, love and new life.