

Devotional blog - 1st Sunday of Lent

Hampton Mission Partnership

Last Tuesday was Shrove Tuesday. This traditional feast was also dubbed as “the pancake day”. In olden days, it was a time to get rid of eggs, flour, butter, and any luxury ingredients before entering the season of Lent. Turning them into pancakes is the perfect way to avoid these luxury items enticing those who are on the lenten fast.

It marks the beginning of the Lent season. The 40 days period (excluding Sundays) of fasting, self-examination and repentance intentionally mimics Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness that occurred straight after his dramatic baptism into his public ministry, proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

It also signifies the 40 years of the Israelites learning to worship God before entering his promised land.

Perhaps this year, you can relate to our present situation more than ever: *“Aren’t we living in the wilderness now?”*

It’s almost a year since the first lockdown began. We are in and out of socially distanced restrictions, the tier system and more lockdowns, just like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness - a place or a sense of uncultivated, uninhabited and inhospitable circumstance.

If we feel like we are in that place, here are four things God encourages you to do. In so doing, you may turn the wilderness into an enriching oasis.

- Have courage, because Jesus is with you -

In the gospel according to Mark (Mark 1:9-15), Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days with animals and angels. He has been there before and he understands. He knows how it feels and he is there to be with you. When we are in him, he will lead us to overcome our trials by grace, not fight; by love, not hate; by acceptance, not rejection to find a new way to deal with the resentment and grudges that may be building up within us.

- Turn to Jesus’ way, not ‘my way’ -

Don’t ask God to bless you according to your own desire. Instead, do what God is blessing. Ask God, the Creator of all lives what he wants you to do and then be willing to do it. It may be to show gratitude to your close family members; give someone a phone call; just saying ‘hello’ to your neighbour or set aside a quiet time to be with God.

- Stay focused and in a fellowship with God and those journeying with us -

The moment we take our eyes off the Lord, we will lose our footing in the sandy wilderness. And when we put our focus on our surroundings and confined to our self, we are deemed to lose our drive and purpose from

day to day. Like Jesus, Angels were with him in the wilderness. He was in constant fellowship with the Father and with his creatures to affirm his identity as God's beloved son. We should find ways to fellowship with the loving community that reaffirm our identity as God's beloved sons and daughters through Jesus.

- *Praise God* -

Israelites were stripped to the bare minimum in the wilderness; however this enabled them to be set free from the world's temptation and turned to the one true God. They learned to trust him through worship and praise. So we also thank God for being with us in the wilderness; He will lead us to his promised land where justice and peace will once again established on earth as it is in heaven.

So, in this season of Lent, may I encourage you not to give up things as we often do during this pilgrimage. Instead, be ready to pick up things that will transform your wilderness into an oasis, within which the living water of Christ will bless you and through you flow out to bless people who are around you. Amen.

Blessings for Lent,

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