

14th February 202: Love and fasting / sacrifice- what does the trumpet call us to? By Sarah Bissell

Reading:

John 8 1-11

Isaiah 58 1-9

Do we have any children? I want to give you a mission very possible today. I want you all to find a bible and then I want you to find 3 verses about love and write them down and decorate them. And then I want you to find 3 people that you share these people verses with and send them to them. You can write a letter -I was thinking of you and I found this verse in the bible. You can create a drawing around the verse – you can take a walk and give it to someone and you can ask them if they would like you to pray for them. Go this Valentines' day and spread God's love.

It's so lovely to be with you again and today I feel two messages calling to us both through the calendar of where are in the year and through these bible passages but I also saw the image of the trumpet calling to us and calling to us to prayer, to shout out about God.

Today is valentine's day and when I just want to send to you and to anyone who needs it some love. I hope you have all received your card. Perhaps in our lifetimes we many never have needed to the touch of love more and we wanted to send you that love? If valentine's day is usually about commercial dinners and big declarations then the earliest stories of St Valentine are of martyr persecuted by Rome for ministering to Christians.

Today's readings actually relate to the start of lent which starts on Wednesday. And in Isaiah 58 you see our first shout aloud with trumpets – I was called myself by the trumpet having recently studied Gideon and then drawn this trumpet for the girls posing the question what will you do with your light and trumpet? I felt that the trumpet must mean something how does it call us out.

The trumpet for Gideon was a tool of God to confuse and outwit their enemies. In the book of revelation, the seven trumpets of seen angels announce the seven plagues before the end of days! But the trumpet can be used in warning and in celebration.

The feast of trumpets is a Jewish festival – Rosh Hashana which marks a time for Jews to focus on repentance and reflection much like our bible verses today. And of course, the period of lent is one of preparation of the believer through prayer, doing penance, mortifying the flesh, repentance of sins, giving and self-denial.

What's that I hear you cry we have been in Lent for over a year!

I remember as a clever and cynical 14-year-old at a catholic school I would give up lack grapes each lent safe in the knowledge that I never ate them anyway – is God expressing his humour in the fact that they are now my favourite food and I eat them practically every evening!

Isaiah tells the same story how we confuse obvious and sometimes grandstanding acts for love. Our old testament reading paints a bleak contrast between what we like to be seen to do and the way it really is:

Your fasting ends in quarrels and strife. This really speaks to me as I have fasted during lent before and found myself falling out with everyone so badly – it really takes away the point of fasting. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND I AM FASTING FOR GOD! Hardly a way to trumpet call to people who do not yet believe

Is it not to, to loose the ties of injustice, to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked clothe and feed them.

The trumpet calls out again in Matthew – asking us once again not to grandstand on our giving and support but to do it in good spirit.

Read verse of Matthew 6.

The trumpet in Matthew 6 also reminds us other real point of giving and acts of kindness – not to trumpet our kindness to people near and far.

This passage reminds us that it is only in the personal relationship with God that we can present our prayers and get to know God.

Perhaps the verse that really helped me to come back to love and sacrifice was John 8. Jesus was with the religious people when a woman comes before the religious people for committing adultery. stands accused of adultery, everyone is their anger and outrage bustles to accuse and cast stones. I am that accuser and so are you and let me tell you that this is a route to understanding the grace and joy of being forgiven and given eternal life. When we really see that we are the sinner and that according to the law the price to pay is death then we open the door to the total joy of being forgiven. Can't you hear the trumpet call you when you think that in spite of everything I have done and said Jesus loves me enough o wipe me clean every day. How good does that grace feel? Often, it's all we need to inspire us on to love others even when we don't really want to.

What does the true picture of Lent look like for us in this pandemic – well it's not about grand gestures we can see. It's about really fighting for heaven here on earth when we have never needed it more and I know that though you all feel alone, bored, stressed at the end of your tether you are doing so many of the things that a time of repentance asks for – feeding and clothing the poor, foodbank, West Windsor Hub and The community fridge, staying at home to keep our frontline workers and vulnerable people safe. Calling texting, phoning and sending letters to anyone you know of who you think might be lonely or in need.

You are all giving so much love which brings us back to Valentine's day. As we bask in socially distanced love today and the trumpet calls us

For the trumpet will sound

For when you really seek me you shall find me

Take the log out of your eye rather than the speck in your eye.

So, what will you do out of the love that flows over from being forgiven on this Valentine's day? When we look forward to lent – we don't need to give up chocolate and grapes if it doesn't shine a light and blow the trumpet to the very simple fact that Jesus lived and then died quite simply so we can live a life of grace so grateful for it that we love in the dirt, knowing that we are the sinner and the finger pointer and then showing compassion and grace.

So, what shall we do today and throughout Lent:

- Prayer with the archbishop every day and for 40 days
- Share our church services with someone each week and why not share your story of why you believe and how God speaks to us
- Send your favourite bible verses to people in need send a bible verse that fits their situation
- Pray for those who persecute him

- How do they know the message if you don't go near them to preach? you need prayer more than point the finger.