

## LENT MEDITATION 2010

### Enough for All Enough for Each

**[Before the Presentation each participant receives a piece of Red Split Lentils]**

I greet you all in the name of Christ, and wish upon you all the peace of God.

I want to explore with you traditions of feasting and fasting.

A summary of my reflection is: Enough for All, Enough for each ... ie Enough

All faiths have traditions of feasts and fasts. I shall concentrate on Christianity and Sikhism – the two faiths I have personal experience of.

Throughout my life I have lived in multi-cultural, multi-faith environments

Nairobi

Dudley

Manchester

Wolverhampton

Sheffield

So I am familiar with all faith traditions. The Muslim practice of Ramadan has always been familiar to me. Many of my neighbours in Nairobi were Muslims. I was always aware of Ramadan.

I was born into a deeply religious Sikh family, and am very enthusiastic about Langar – the open meal for all, - and also about Fasting.

I have fasted since I was about 5 years old.

I remember Fasting when I was 5-6 years old, and have a distinct memory of being tempted whenever I was alone, eg in a bathroom, to have a drink of water.

This fasting within the Sikh faith was similar to the Ramadan practice. It was fasting during daylight hours.

The way it works is that

- you have a feast before dawn breaks, and then have a feast at the onset of darkness in the evening. The focus was very much on when to eat and when not to eat.

I don't think I ate less food. I just ate more when it was dark. That was the approach of a five year old Sikh boy to fasting. I made sure I had a good breakfast and a good supper.

I used to observe 2-3 days in a year with such a fast.

I fell out of this practice when I moved, at the age of 11, to the UK with my parents.

Within my experience as a follower of Christ fasting was never a feature until I moved to Pitsmoor in Sheffield in 1994, to live in an area where the majority of my neighbours were Muslims.

Once again, as in Nairobi when I was younger, I was aware of the Muslim observation of Ramadan. Now as an adult. Ramadan is a month long daylight fast.

Many people assumed I was a Muslim, just because I am Asian, and always asked – How is the Roze?

That's not a question about the type of wine I might drink. I'm a teetotaller!

It's rather a question that asks:

How is the fasting? Roze means Fast

My answer has always been that I observe a forty day fast during a season called Lent – and break it with an Easter Day lunch Feast!

My Muslim neighbours have helped me to take fasting more seriously. But my personal connection of fasting with Lent has made me reflect on the relationship between Lent and Fasting.

## **LENT**

What is Lent?

How do you observe Lent?

Now please just look at the small orangey item you were given at the start. What is it?

Lentils.

Red Split Lentils.

I shall return to the Lentils later.

Lent is so often connected to the idea of giving things up

- not having luxuries eg chocolate

It is important to reflect on what we can do without.

We have too much.

And because we have too much we tend to waste or throw away too much.

- Nearly 450m tonnes of waste is produced in Britain each year, enough to fill the Albert Hall every two hours.
- Britain throws away £20 billion worth of unused food each year. This is equivalent to five times our spending on International Aid and enough to lift 150m people out of starvation.

- Obesity is a serious health issue affecting millions of people in the UK, and a huge cost to the NHS now and in the future.

Yes – we do need to find ways to not only recycle or repair waste, but also – more importantly – to reduce waste.

We do need to consume less.

Lent is an annual reminder of this.

But Lent is not just about consuming less.

Fasting is not just about eating less.

Listen to these words from Isaiah 58:6-7

“Is not this the fast that I choose?  
To loose the bonds of injustice  
To undo the thongs of the yoke  
To let the oppressed go free  
And to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with  
The hungry,  
And bring the homeless poor  
Into your house;  
When you see the naked,  
To cover them,  
And not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

There is a different approach to fasting here:

It's not about going without food yourself. It's more about ensuring that no one goes without food. It's about so living that all have enough. It's about the achievement of justice.

- freedom from oppression
- freedom from hunger
- providing homes for the homeless
- clothes for the naked
- remembering we are all family.

In the light of Isaiah 58, my approach to fasting does not require having no food. It's more about having a simple life style, and more about sharing and insisting on justice for all, enough for, enough for each.

I have never been an eater of chocolates and sweets. I don't consume wine, beer or spirits.

I do enjoy food.

My theology is very much centred on the words of Jesus:

“whenever you meet in my name have some food and remember me.”

Jesus himself took great delight in food.

Wherever there was a party he was there.

He insisted on ensuring all had food to eat.

He especially insisted on eating with the most excluded people around him – and the greatest criticism levelled at him was that “he eats with sinners.”

## **FOOD AND FEASTING IN JOHN’S GOSPEL**

Let’s take a glimpse at Jesus’ approach to food, in just one of the Gospels, John.

The very first miracle in John is related to a feast. Jesus is at a wedding celebration. The party runs out of wine. The message is conveyed to Jesus: “They have no wine”. As a result of Jesus’ action the party guests end up having not only enough wine, but wine of the “best” quality. [John 2]

We then see Jesus at a well in a Samaritan Town. It is mid-day. He has walked far. He comes to a well and asks one of the women who come to draw water to give him a drink, and ends up promising “wells of water springing up to everlasting life”. [John 4]

Then we see him on a hillside, out in the country. He has a crowd before him and wants to give them food. His Disciples panic about where they will get food and how much it may cost to feed thousands. A small boy offers his picnic lunch of Bread and Fish. Jesus takes this offering and feeds the multitude. We read that they all ate to the point where they were “filled”. Then all the leftovers were gathered up so that nothing was lost or wasted. [John 6]

Later we read about Jesus being served Supper by Martha, and where Mary washes and anoints Jesus’ feet with perfume. [John 12]

Then there is the famous Last Supper Jesus shared with his Disciples. A supper where he takes up the position of host, washed his Disciples’ feet, and shared food with them. [John 13]

Finally there is a beautiful story of Jesus sharing Breakfast on a Beach at the crack of Dawn with his Disciples. He Bar B Qs Fish and provides some Bread, and asks his Disciples to provide some of their own Fish. [John 21]

## **THE EUCHARIST**

Jesus left his followers only one liturgical instruction:

Whenever you eat in my name have some food and remember me.

The Eucharist – a feast, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet is the special Christian Sacrament, bearing in mind different denominations have different approaches to it.

The also Eucharist offers helpful pointers as we reflect on fasting and feasting.

The Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and a reminder that God the heavenly Host requires that

- all are invited to the share at the Table that is the feast of life
- all shall be included and none shall be excluded
- all shall have enough, none shall have too much and none shall have too little
- all shall be at the Table, none shall be treated as less than humans and left to eat scraps that fall off the Table
- all shall be treated equally, and all shall be seated at the same level
- the host serves and does not require to be served
- the Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all
- all who share this meal at this Table shall be awakened to work and pray for equality and the end of hunger; and hold up the brokenness in people and in relationships.

The Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and a reminder that the heavenly Host requires that all who feast here also fast in the sense that they

- refrain from over consumption and gluttony
- to have only as much as you need and not to hoard.

Bishop John Chrysostom challenged those who shared in the Eucharist and honour Christ in the blessings and breaking and sharing of bread and wine to honour Christ in daily life: "Would you honour the Body of Christ? Do not despise his nakedness; do not honour him here in Church clothed in fine clothes and then pass him by unclothed and frozen outside. Remember that he said "This is my body", and made good his words, also said, "You saw me hungry and gave me no food," and "in so far as you did it not to one of these, you did it not to me." There are clues about feasting and fasting in the Eucharist.

It is fruitful to reflect on the Eucharist in the light of Genesis 18 and Luke 24, and indeed all the meals Jesus had. Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity repays meditation too. The Icon is a beautiful study of the meal Abraham shared with the strangers (angels) under the Oaks of Mamre. It also reflects Jesus' meal with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Icon throws some light on the equality, and honour in relationship in the Godhead (Holy Trinity), and also on the equality and honour Jesus showed in all the meals he shared – the Last Supper with the 12 yes, but also in the meal on the road to Damascus, and the Breakfast on the Beach (John 21), and all the meals Jesus shared with women and men and children from many backgrounds. In all these meals all participants ate to their "satisfaction".

In many ways the meals Jesus shared are a kind of Langar – a meal for all.

So I do not observe Lent by eating nothing during day light hours.

I observe Lent each day of the year by approaching food in a prayerful way, and by constantly focussing on the scandal of starvation and hunger in a world of plenty and wastefulness, by trying always to refrain from over consumption and gluttony, and by refraining from hoarding [especially food].

Let me draw my reflections to a close by returning to Lentils.

## LENTILS

In my younger days it seemed to me that my mother only cooked lentils. We always seemed to have them. They would be cooked and served one day. The next day we had them again – only with added water, to make them go further.

Red split lentils – called Daal in Hindi, Urdu and Panjabi.

Daal literally means “crushed”.

Lentil Daal can only be considered to be cooked when the Lentils are utterly crushed into a kind of cream of lentils

Here’s a simple recipe.

My mother’s recipe.

Daal for 4

1 teacup of lentils (wash and drain)  
¼ tsp turmeric  
Salt to taste  
1 small onion sliced  
Knob of butter  
10 – 15 leaves of chopped fresh coriander  
2 pts of water.

Wash the lentils and soak them for 30 minutes. Bring them to a boil in a saucepan. Add turmeric. Reduce and allow to simmer, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are completely mashed – ideally 1 ½ hrs – 2 hrs. Add water during cooking to maintain soup consistency.

While the Daal is cooking, fry the onion in the butter, until the onions are golden.

Add these to the Daal just before serving.

If you like a little extra zing add ¼ tsp of Garam Masala just before serving, and garnish with the fresh chopped coriander.

Serve with fresh naan and natural yoghurt.

Enjoy!

Daal is the root of the word Dalit. Dalit is the term given to the most excluded people in India, those crushed by exclusion and the resulting starvation or homelessness.

Daal is one of the cheapest forms of food, and feeds the poor.

In Indian theology Jesus is Dalit. He identifies with the poorest, and calls us to such connection and solidarity.

Jesus connects through food, through eating, feasting and fasting with people.

In Lent – I eat lentils and meditate along these lines.

In fact my daughter, when she was aged 5, thought Lentils are the Lent food because I focus on them so much in Lent.

## **CONCLUSION**

I've been able to reflect a little by focussing on Lent, Lentils and a little about what could be termed Lent-ills.

There is great physical, mental and spiritual benefit in going without food for a period. It is good for the body. It can aid meditation. It can inspire reflection on gluttony, hunger and starvation.

But this is not the only way to Fast.

Fasting is not only achieved by going without food. Fasting is also about sharing, and being able to say "enough", and about insisting that there is "enough for all, enough for each".

So, in our lifestyle, but especially during Lent, or any other period set aside for Fasting, let us remember :

Share food.

We have enough; we must share more.

We have enough food; we must waste less share more.

Shop less – be prepared to say "enough".

Work less – rest more

Phone less, talk less – listen more

Drive less, and walk more as we are able to.

Have fewer meetings – meet more

Use less energy – conserve more

In our world we desire

- less hatred. We've had enough hatred and hostility. Enough hatred.
- no more killings, and certainly not in the Name of God. Enough killing.
- an end to war. War is an outdated form of conflict resolution. Enough war.
- an elimination of religious and political bigotry and extremism. Enough bigotry.
- less violence. Let's learn to prevent and stop all forms of violence. Enough violence.

Enough.

If we could achieve these things we could achieve

- enough for all
- enough for each.

I leave you with thoughts from two have taught me much about saying enough.

“Aspire not to have more but to be more”

Archbishop Oscar Romero

“There is enough in the world for human need, but not human greed”

Mahatma Gandhi

Thank you.