



MODERATOR'S 2026 LENT MESSAGE

40 days & 40 nights

For the first third of my 36 years in parish ministry 'I didn't do Lent'. I had my preaching plan; I didn't use the lectionary either. I always took into account that Easter was a significant weekend with Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. But looking back, Easter stood on its own as it were from the flow and context of the Scriptural narrative in my preaching plans.

When you read the articles and commentaries on the origin of Lent, two things stand out. The first is the 40-day period of Lent. Moses and Elijah went onto the mountains to fast and pray for 40 days, both receiving "the word of the Lord". Then there was Jesus, who was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit for 40 days and nights to be tempted by Satan. He fasted and prayed. The climax of that account is Satan receiving "the word of the Lord". In my spiritual journey, without any claim of receiving a revelation that changed history, I spent 40 days and 40 nights in the wilds of Fiordland on a solo retreat. Yes, it was life-changing, and the experiences of the Lord are in my soul until this day.

The second aspect that catches my attention is the fasting aspect, not as an act of repentance or anything like that, but an expression of devotion to no one else or anything else like church tradition, but to be centred on Jesus, his devotion to humankind through his crucifixion for the sins of the world on the cross, and his uplifting of those who believe in him through his resurrection.

What to fast with is an interesting question. Have you noticed how Protestants tend to be rather shallow or flippant on this topic? Give up coffee. Give up McDonalds. Good for the health maybe but do those things actually draw you closer to a deeper spiritual understanding of the person of Jesus as he set his path towards the cross. Now that I am much more experienced in ministry, Lent is now a deliberate journey with the faith community I am in looking for inner transformation of mind and soul. Past the intellectual, past academic answers, into the trials and pain of life to find The Healer.

One of the things I discovered in my Fiordland 40-day retreat was that I stepped away from the distractions of life where the static of the world stopped in my mind and I found the thin place where heaven and earth meet. It actually exists. It is difficult to take a group of people to a place like this, but worth trying through creative interaction in Lenten activities.

Lent is a journey of returning to God. We are prodigals. Prayer, solitude and acts of compassion are the cobblestones of the path we take at Lent. You can discover who you are in Christ and your own humanity as a result. *"Dear Lord, be with me today. I don't always know the way. I don't know the words at times. Show me the way".*

Peter

Right Rev Peter Dunn
Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
moderator@presbyterian.org.nz