



Comfort ye my people

Lent Course 2022

**A five-week course for groups and
individuals as we journey through Lent**

With an Introduction from the Bishop of Chichester

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CHICHESTER 

A welcome from the Bishop of Chichester

“I’m very well, thank you.” That’s the response we normally give when people ask. It takes quite a lot of courage to say something else. So we live with the stuff that makes us not very well. And that can be a very heavy burden to bear.

The season of Lent offers us an opportunity to lay down the things that burden us. Lent is a season of safety when we can admit that not all is well. It gives us permission to review our lives and be honest about how we damage ourselves, other people and the world we inhabit.

Jesus Christ says to us, “Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And it is very often a hauntingly beautiful visual image or sound that prompts us to explore this offer of rest and comfort.

The soul that is wearied by the effort of shutting out the hurts and fears within is unlikely to welcome more tasks, more tests, more words and instructions. It is the beauty of God’s unconditional love that comforts and releases us from what we fear.

In the 5 sessions of this year’s Lent Course, we are offered beautiful images, stories and songs that speak of the God who knows us and loves us. In each session someone will speak to you about the comfort that they have found in these gifts. They will invite you to begin your own exploration of how God might lift your burdens and give you space and time to rest.

I wish to thank those who have contributed to this Course and had the courage to say that, though it is not easy, it is possible to live well.

I hope that you, inspired by them, will find that comfort, hope and joy emerge from your Lenten preparation for Holy Week and the triumph of the resurrection.

++ Martin



An introductory Video is available setting the wider context for our Lent course in which Bishop Martin is in conversation with two of our contributors. You can watch it [here](#).

Introduction

Lent, culminating in Easter, is the most special season in the Christian year. Recalling the forty days and forty nights during which Jesus fasted in the desert and rejected Satan's temptations (Matthew 4.1-11), Lent is a time of preparation for celebrating his final victory at Easter in the glory of his cross and resurrection.

It gives us an opportunity to focus afresh on Jesus, to renew our discipleship and to struggle against all forms of sin, in ourselves, in society and in the Church. During the Lenten season Christians prepare for baptism when they are plunged into new life in Christ - rising from the font to live at one with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the community of the Church.

Part of the discipline of this season is growing in self-control. The Bible offers us three traditional means to help this: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

- Prayer means listening more attentively to God's word in Scripture and responding with thanksgiving, penitence and praise
- Fasting means giving up food and drink so that we can share with the needy but could also entail, e.g., fasting from the multitude of images bombarding us through advertising and the internet.
- Almsgiving means giving of ourselves – our money if we can - but even more importantly giving time to anyone in need, especially the lonely and abandoned.

In Lent the Church invites us to deepen our discipleship and grow in relationship with God, to recover our first love of Christ (Revelation 2.4), and to surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16.13). It is a time for rediscovering God's love as we prepare for the drama of Christ's death and resurrection in the great three days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The discipline of Lent pushes us forward into life, forward to Christ's Easter joy.

The focus of this year's Lent Course is on God's consolation, as indicated by the quotation from the Prophet Isaiah (40.1). We sometimes associate this theme too narrowly with Advent, but it is very much the heart of our faith, especially at Easter.

Before he suffered, Jesus promised to ask the Father to send us another comforter, the Holy Spirit of truth, to accompany, guide and console us (John 14.16). It is worth stressing that word 'another'.

Jesus himself – God for us - is already the great consoler, Emmanuel, 'God with us' (Matthew 1.23). Christ's demonstration of God's love (Romans 5.8) by laying down his life for his friends (John 15.13) and his glorious resurrection (Matthew 28.6) offer the greatest consolation we can have in this life. The Holy Spirit – God in us – (John 14.17) brings us that consolation and makes it real in our lives as individuals and as communities (1 John 3.24). No matter what difficulties we face - personal problems, crises, tragedies, even a pandemic – 'The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our stronghold' (Psalm 46.11).

This Lent Course offers five short spiritual exercises written by clergy of Chichester Diocese. Each one contains four elements:

A powerful image from the Visual Commentary on Scripture Website to awaken vision thevcs.org

A passage from the Bible to invite meditation

A short prayer to lift us up to God

A hymn which we can sing and pray to let our spirits soar

The meditations are also available in the form of short podcasts on the Diocese of Chichester SoundCloud Channel.

With our inner ear attentive to God's call, let us journey together on this 2022 Lenten road. Led by the Spirit we will be brought ever deeper into new life in Christ, who comes to meet us with his Easter greeting of peace (John 20.19).

The Reverend Earl Collins

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