

Dear friends

It was my turn to lead bible study the day after David Bowie had died. I think it's fair to say that most of us were a bit put out by the amount of news coverage his death had received the previous day. And it wasn't just David Bowie that died in January, amongst others there was Alan Rickman of Harry Potter fame and Glenn Frey from the Eagles; all of them reported in the media. I'm not going to go into the rights and wrongs of their deaths seeming to be more important than others, clearly to their families their loss is huge and it is to their families that my sympathy goes. I just don't know why some sections of our society imagine that celebrities will live forever because they are celebrities! It seems that even their celebrity status couldn't protect them from death. Because, guess what, death comes to us all, eventually! Even Jesus had to die.

Speaking of which we are coming up to that time in the church's calendar when we remember the death of Jesus on Good Friday and his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday and it got me to thinking that we could never have experienced the resurrection without the death of Jesus first. It's always concerned me when people think that they can have Easter day without going through the agony of Good Friday because if the Easter experience teaches us anything it's that good things can come out of very bad experiences. Death has to happen before we can experience resurrection and new life.

We are about to enter the period of lent, a time when we traditionally give things up, the president of conference is urging those of us who drink alcohol to consider joining him in giving alcohol up for lent. I'll let you decide if you are joining him. The practice of giving things up for lent is symbolic of our commitment to penitence and self-denial in that we can observe the time of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection with great devotion. I would like to suggest to you that self-denial, penitence and death that leads to new life should be things that we are engaged in all of the time not just during lent. My question for you to ponder during lent is this: What things in our own lives, in our church life and in the life of the world do we need to repent of, deny ourselves, allow to die in order that new life may be formed, in our lives, the church and the world?

I'll leave you with the words of Paul in the letter to the Philippians:

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be

exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:4-11).

Yours in Christ,

Rev Jan