

# MINISTRY IN LOCKDOWN

## Robert's Sermon from Passion Sunday

Today on Passion Sunday, the start of Passiontide I thought that instead of a sermon I would explain a bit about Lent as there is a lot of people who do not know what Lent is all about.

The Lenten season may not be the longest season in the church year, but it is a most important season. It is a time for spiritual preparation through repentance and growth in faith, a getting ready for Easter. It is the time of the church year when the passion and death of Jesus comes into focus. It begins with a special day of repentance, Ash Wednesday, and ends in the depth of sorrow and tragedy on Good Friday. The name of the season, Lent, does not reflect the mood or message of the season. It is an old Anglo-Saxon word, Lencten or Lenchthen, which means the lengthening of the days as spring appears.

The development of The Season of Lent as a period of 40 days came into being as a result of a long period of development. Originally in the first century Lent was only a period of 40 hours, in keeping with the 40 hours Jesus' body was in the tomb. The 40-hour observance ended with an Easter morning service at 3 a.m. Later the 40 hours grew into six days during the third century. These six days were known as Holy Week, days of strict abstinence. Holy Week observance began in Jerusalem during the fourth century. Services were held on the appropriate day at the places where special events took place during the last week of Jesus' life: for example the Upper Room, Gethsemane, Pilate's Court.

When Holy Week was observed in the West, they substituted the stations of the cross for the actual places in Jerusalem.

In the fourth century, the days of Holy Week were designated:

Palm Sunday -when the church looked at Christ's entry into Jerusalem

Monday -- the cleansing of the temple

Tuesday -- the Discourse on the Mount of Olives

Wednesday -- Judas' agreement

Maundy Thursday – The Last Supper and feet washing

Friday -- Calvary

Saturday -- the tomb

The six days grew into 36 days, as a tithe of the 365 days of the year. By approximately

731, four days were added to the 36 to make the present season of 40 days. The four days consisted of Ash Wednesday to the First Sunday in Lent. The number 40 was a popular and meaningful number: Jesus was tempted for 40 days in the wilderness, Moses fasted 40 days on Sinai, Elijah fasted 40 days on the way to the mountain of God and the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness.

Sundays were never a part of Lent. We speak of the Sundays in Lent, not Sundays of Lent. However, the Lenten emphasis spilled over into the Sunday services in terms of the use of the penitential colour, violet/purple or Sack cloth and the dropping of the "Alleluia" and the "Gloria."

The church changes its colours a lot during the year, and not just because the vicar thinks that they would like to wear red today.

Lenten colours are Purple or Sack Cloth, we change the colour on Mothering Sunday to Rose as this is also called Refreshment Sunday – the Rose vestments are not representing a feminist movement, it is instead worn to remind us that the season of preparation is coming to a close, and the great feast is swiftly approaching.

We change the colour again on Palm Sunday – next week – to Red. This is to remind us of the blood that Christ is about to shed for us.

Maundy Thursday sees the church use its White vestments to celebrate the first celebration of the Last Supper. The church is then stripped ready for Good Friday when we remember the Crucifixion. The church remains stripped till Easter morning when we once more are in White or Gold to celebrate the glorious resurrection.

The start of Lent depends each year on the date of Easter, and in 325 the church decided that Easter would fall on the first Sunday after the full moon which occurs on or after March 21.

Ash Wednesday was given its name by Pope Urban II in 1099. Prior to this, the first day of Lent was known as "Beginning of the Fast." The day was set aside as a special day of repentance and as the opening of a season of repentance. "Ash" symbolized the repentance called for. Priests had the custom of sprinkling ashes on the heads of the faithful as they said, "Remember thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return." The ashes came, and still come from, the burned palms of the previous Palm Sunday. To this day, many Christians receive on Ash Wednesday a smudge of ashes on their foreheads. Protestants originally dropped the custom because they felt it contradicted the Gospel for Ash Wednesday: which says: "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen of men." (Matthew 6:16-18) But many Anglicans now also have this tradition as well.

Shrove Tuesday of course is the day before Ash Wednesday. "Shrove" referred to the shriving or cleansing of their sins by going to confession on this day. On the other hand,

it was a day of feasting and for carnival. The French called it "Mardi Gras." It was a time to use up their store of fat which was forbidden during Lent. Germans used up the fat by making doughnuts on Shrove Tuesday, and the English specialized in pancakes.

So, a whistle stop tour of what Lent is about . It is not just about giving up Chocolate, but instead is a deeply moving time when we as Christians should reflect on Jesus, what He did, how He was treated and how we too can be more Christlike in all that we do.

Amen