

*Archbishop Stephen gave a short reflection for the First Sunday of Lent for local BBC radio stations*

Twenty years ago, as a lowly Canon in Peterborough Cathedral, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, asked me to write his Lent book for that year.

In the Introduction, I wrote this –

“Lent is an important, but often neglected, season in the church year. It is supposed to be a time when we review our spiritual life, think again about what it means to be a follower of Christ, reset the compass of our discipleship, and prepare ourselves to celebrate the Easter festival. But often we just give up biscuits.”

These words have often been quoted since: the disparity between the great and noble calling of the Lenten season, a time for fasting and prayer, and the rather - if we're honest - quite pathetic reality of our Lenten disciplines.

So how shall we approach Lent?

Giving things up, or taking things on?

Well I'm going for a bit of both. So although I don't really like telling people what I'm doing for Lent (in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus very clearly tells us that this should be between us and God) I will be trying to eat far less meat and make changes to my lifestyle that will enable me to walk a bit more lightly on the Earth; and I will be seeking out additional times for rest and reflection; and I will be thinking again about what it means to live my life in Christ.

In recent years, probably the most significant discovery I've made in this regard is that I'm one of those people who doesn't really know how to be still unless I'm moving. Consequently, walking and pilgrimage have become important for my prayers.

So I'm going to be walking through Lent. Looking towards Easter. Even daring to hope, as on that evening of the first Easter day, that I will find Jesus walking with me - even if I don't always have eyes to recognise him.

Oh, that made my eyes be opened and my heart burn within me as I seek to discover, as if for the first time, that Jesus died and rose for me.

The title of that book 20 years ago was I Thirst. The whole book was a meditation on these two words of Jesus in John's Gospel. For me, they say everything.