

A Day of Fasting and Prayer on Wednesday 10th June

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgement goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.

Hosea 6.1-6



On Wednesday 10th June the Deanery of Blackburn with Darwen is inviting all of us in the churches here to commit ourselves to a *day of prayer and fasting* for the strengthening and renewal of the Church as a whole here. We will pray for God's

blessing upon our witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as the sign of God's compassion and mercy and grace and goodness towards us. We will pray for the renewal among us of hope. We do so as part of our commemoration of the centenary of our diocese. It is an opportunity to review the effectiveness of our life as the People of God and, where fitting, to recalibrate it to make it that it may be more fruitful.

When we fast and pray we do not do so in order to commend our *own* hopes and longings to God: instead, it is for us to become more closely aligned with *God's* hopes and longings for us. The exercise of *self-restraint* and of *attentiveness* is designed to open our inner ears that we may pay closer attention to the call of God upon us. It is a very ancient practice – alongside the observance of self-denial on Fridays through the year and the keeping of the Lenten fast in the weeks leading up to Easter.

During the last few generations our commitment as Christians to these spiritual disciplines has become weaker and weaker. It is hard not to see this as part of the cause of the weakening of the Church as a whole. It is as if we have become distracted from the call upon us of God to a simpler and more holy life, and assumed the disciplines of faith to be optional. And our faith is often the weaker because of this. We have put less *effort* into our Christian discipline; we have *received* fewer of the blessings of the Holy Spirit. This is why our day of fasting and prayer this week is focused at least in part on the *renewal* of our faith and hope and love as God's people here in Blackburn and Darwen.

It is a matter of *personal discretion* how we choose to fast and pray. Some people may give up one or two meals and wait until the evening before breaking the fast (and there is an invitation to join other members of the deanery at St James' Lower Darwen for a supper at the end of the fast at 7.30pm): there is a QR code on the poster to book a place – but please do so before the end of Sunday 7th June. We will end the fast at St Jude's with our Eucharist at 7pm. For other people it may be more appropriate to eat much *simpler* food than usual – for example to give up meat and fish or cakes and treats – but to do so with conscious intention to eat *more modestly* as a gesture of self-offering before God. And we are invited to spend more time than usual in *prayer* – in *waiting on God* and seeking to *discern God's will* for us. This Sunday's text from the Prophet Hosea offers a focus to turn our attention away from the usual things which distract us, back to the calling of God. Notice that the Prophet remains always *full of hope*, even as he acknowledges the lapses in our spiritual commitment which need to be recognised and put right. The text is neither desolate nor despairing. For God longs that we shall be *reawakened to him*; and this is always possible if we allow it to be so.

As part of our own contribution to this day we shall host a **public reading of Mark's Gospel** at St Michael's between 10am and 12 noon. This is a chance to listen to the whole Gospel uninterrupted – to hear afresh its fundamental (and fundamentally hopeful) call upon us, and its invitation to us to come back into the embrace of God, in whom all things will be made new. It would be great if some of you can join us for this Gospel Reading – and even to share in the reading itself!

Please consider how you can use Wednesday 10th June for your own spiritual renewal, and that of the wider Church as a whole. [si](#)