

Well, I must be getting older. Time is definitely flying by faster; here we are already through the first two months of 2022 and 1st March is upon us; and this year it coincides with Shrove Tuesday. Hopefully that means there was a plate of pancakes for you on Tuesday. The following day, Wednesday 2nd March, in the church year is Ash Wednesday and marks the beginning of Lent.

The characteristic of Lent is as a time of self-examination, penitence, self-denial (hence getting in the pancakes before Lent starts), and preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Ashes are an ancient sign of penitence; penitence being 'the action of feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having done wrong', with everyone recognising that we all get things wrong and need to repent (repent meaning 'turning' from the things we do that are wrong). From the Middle Ages it became the custom for Christians to begin Lent by being marked in ash with the sign of the cross. The ash comes from the burning of last year's palm crosses. On Shrove Tuesday I follow the tradition of burning the old palm crosses to make the ash ready for the imposition at the evening service at St George's on Ash Wednesday. The liturgy of this penitence is very powerful. It marks a time, rather like New Year I guess, of saying "I'm going to try and do better from now on".

Towards the end of Lent, the beginning of Holy Week, we celebrate Palm Sunday once again. This year it is on 10th April. In Benenden there will be a service at 8am and a service at 10am. In between these services, breakfast will be served in the Memorial Hall from 9am. Again, you would be very welcome to join us for breakfast, get your new palm cross and join in a walk up the Green to St George's for the 10am service.

Between now and then we are starting a new event/gathering/service aimed specifically for families: Connect Four begins on Saturday 5th March. It is a very, very informal service in the Mission Church, Sandhurst, where we will gather at 4pm, hence the 'Four', and join together in some fellowship, chat, a Bible story, a craft activity, a simple talk (rather like a school assembly/worship) to help us think about the story, along with a bit of singing. All of it is about helping us to connect. Connect with one another; connect with the Bible story; and connect with God. Helping us to make God relevant in our lives today. Cake, biscuits, juice, tea and coffee will be on the go throughout. Come along; give Connect Four a go.

Revd David Commander, Rector