

I was distracted as I said Morning Prayer this morning, with all the thoughts of things I needed to do: writing this talk, finishing the mailing for Sunday and emailing Sarah to send it out, several personal calls about my mother's estate. I rather quickly felt a bit overwhelmed, and I hadn't even had the usual distraction of What do I have for lunch/supper? It was rather like standing in the sea, turning round, and noticing a large wave bearing down; a moment of panic with the thought that it might knock you off your feet and roll you round under the water – not a nice experience.

It wasn't as if any of these tasks were particularly tricky, or that I was feeling especially vulnerable, yet the feeling of being swamped was for a moment not pleasant. I took a deep breath, returned to my psalms, and completed the morning office.

I tell you this because I was going to talk this evening about how to do Lent in these strange times, how perhaps to interpret the traditional *prayer, fasting and almsgiving* for 2021. Last year, I downloaded an article titled *The Lentiest of Lents*, and this year is not very different, but I've always thought these three are open to imaginative re-thinking. But what I was going to say was essentially about doing more stuff, or about what not to do, which is almost the same thing.

Now if I've felt a bit overwhelmed, it's very likely others have too; and if that's how we're feeling, absolutely the last thing we want is more to do or feel obliged not to do, however well-intentioned or spiritually motivated. So what might help?

Going behind those classic Lent responses is to be reminded of their purpose – not ends in themselves, but means of drawing closer to God, of being in a better place to celebrate the truly wonderful resurrection of Jesus. Hence Lent is a time of grace and a joyful season, never a wallowing in self-pity or a spiritual triathlon. Not a focus on self at all, but an attempt better to focus on God.

Framing the question like this, might open up some possibilities for you. A sub-question could be What do you find nourishing at present, apart from gin and chocolate? Or phrased slightly differently: What lifts your vision and takes you beyond yourself, again besides gin and chocolate?

I find being outside in nature helps a lot, even in bad weather; but as the sun gets warmer and there is evidence of Spring, so much the better. It's also physical movement which helps, it seems to get blocked energies flowing again in mind and body.

These are the moments perhaps when we can give also some attention to the multiple losses we have suffered individually and communally, and place them in the perspective of Lent, Good Friday and Easter Day. Rather than being panicked by the wave bearing down on us, we lift our feet from the sand, kick off and surf back to the shore. Amen