



For a time such as this – week four

Rev Dr Jenny Tymms

This week some of the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted: now we can travel up to 50 kms from our homes and we can visit a park or beach for more than just exercise. These small opportunities are worth savouring.

This reminds me of how the religious practice of asceticism (like fasting) is meant to help us. Rather than interpreting the withdrawal of an habitual enjoyment as a form of punishment, such a practice helps us grow in two ways. First, it gives us time to do our “inner work” which we often neglect as we become preoccupied with our busy activities in the outer world. The extra time provides us with the opportunity to deepen our friendship with God and to attend to the needs of our soul. We reflect on our real priorities and how they may have become skewed over time. The second purpose of asceticism is to cleanse our senses. When we haven’t eaten food for a while (or gone for a drive or for a walk along the beach or in the bush) we approach the experience with refreshed senses and with a more deeply-felt delight.

When Jesus reminded his followers to consider the lilies (Luke 12: 27-31) he was teaching us to trust God, to stop being so anxious about our lives and our bodily needs and to put first things first. But I like to think he was also reminding us about the sheer beauty of God’s creation which we so often pass by without even noticing!

So in the next days and weeks, why not ponder the possibility that these times we are living through are an opportunity for a kind of contemporary asceticism, for deepening our dependence on the God we can utterly trust and for renewing our appreciation of God’s creation (including our family and friends). Why not also make a conscious decision to go somewhere or do something you haven’t been able to do for the last few weeks. Plan it. Do it. Savour the experience. And give God thanks.