

# *Struggling to New Life*



In the picture above, there are various grasses and bushes struggling together. If you look closely, they are surrounding part of a small pond where birds can obtain a drink or a quick bath, and several frogs find a place to live and croak when it is raining.

I suggest that this is an image of how our lives or minds can feel from time to time when we feel sick or don't know what to do. Things are vying for our attention from various directions and we are tempted to give up, instead of going a little deeper and being refreshed, as it were, by the water supporting the leaves of the water lilies.

During the weeks of Lent we are encouraged to consciously grow in God's love as we walk with Jesus as his disciples. This journey will probably entail some struggling by us to know and achieve what we are called to do.

The first three Sundays in Lent can be seen, by me at least, to have gospel stories in which people are struggling. In the gospel for Lent 1, (Matthew 4:1-11), Jesus was fasting in the desert, and struggled to know how he was to carry out his ministry. Was it to be by displaying his power, like the power of God which created the universe? Or was it to be in weakness? We might ask, can human beings better learn about God's love in the weakness of a baby being born in a manger in Bethlehem than in the acts of a powerful leader? Are we called to share God's love with others in pain and gentleness, or are we to try

to force love on to others? In the arid desert Jesus discerned how he was to move forward in his life. He answered the devil by drawing on God's words.

If we connect Bible passages, the desert was also where the struggling people of Israel under Moses, were by God led to freedom, sustained by bread and water, and given the 10 commandments on their way to new life in the Promised Land (Exodus 20).

In the gospel for Lent 2, (John 3:1-17), we have the story of Nicodemus. He struggled to discern the identity of Jesus. He knew Jesus was a teacher come from God because he had seen the miracles Jesus had performed, but could he go further? Nicodemus came at night in the dark to have a conversation with Jesus because he was afraid of the light and what it might reveal about himself. Jesus explained to him that he needed to be born again, or born from above. Nicodemus could only think of being born again by entering his mother's womb, and was unable to grasp being reborn of the Spirit, and receiving eternal life. Although Nicodemus went away still in the dark of unknowing, he reappears with Joseph of Arimathea at Jesus' tomb, bringing myrrh and aloes, (John 19:39). Had he later been able to move out of the shadows and into the light of faith?

Jesus struggled in the dark in the Garden of Gethsemane, (Mark 14:35), before his capture and crucifixion. A few verses on, in v. 42, he came to embrace God's light. His struggle was over and a deep peace settled in him.

In the gospel for Lent 3, (John 4:5-42), a Samaritan woman came to a well to obtain water, and met Jesus. He asked her for water and she engaged in a conversation with him. She was puzzled as to why he, a Jew, was speaking to her, a Samaritan. Jesus and the woman crossed barriers through their conversation in which she struggled as it became more lengthy and complex. Unlike Nicodemus, she persisted in trying to emerge from her darkness and confusion. Slowly she began to understand what Jesus said and thirst for the living water he had to offer. Eventually, even though she was not completely certain, she left her water jar and hurried back to her village. She told others, those she usually avoided, about Jesus, and urged them to meet him. She even suggested that he could be the promised Messiah. They responded to her words by immediately going to the well to see Jesus for themselves. Later they

were able to declare that Jesus was indeed, “the Saviour of the world”.

On the cross Jesus said, “I am thirsty”, (John 19:28). A sponge soaked in vinegar was raised to his lips. Was Jesus thirsting not only for water but for the salvation of all?

As followers of Jesus who also struggle at times, can we obey God, and be willing to enter the darkness of suffering to reveal the light of God in the world?

Are we willing to keep struggling to grow in our love for Jesus and so to better understand how we are to behave as baptised members of the body of Christ, living in God’s kingdom?

Like the Samaritan woman, are we able to thirst for the salvation of all, and cross barriers so others may receive the gift of the Spirit and experience eternal life in God’s love?

This Lent, may we with God’s help, be reconciled with our past experiences and present difficulties, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us deeper into God’s love. In this journey we may find through our struggling, refreshment, peace and new life in God’s gift of living water.

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