

I knew that I was a sinner. I didn't have to think about it. It made sense to me. I had done bad things. No question. It was an easy acceptance.

But there was more to it than that, much more. It wasn't just that I was a sinner. It was that something was wrong, with the world that I was living in.

By 20 I could see things weren't right. Mum and Dad divorced. My experience of people taught me that they weren't always what they said they were. They didn't care much about each other. They took what they could and then moved on. People were cruel and unkind. They couldn't be relied on. You needed to look after yourself or you were in trouble.

I knew in the marrow of my bones that there was something wrong with the world in which I was living. It wasn't until someone told me that Jesus Christ could do something about it, that I had a name for it. Before then there was just a wrongness. A deep-seated harrowing wrongness, and as far as I was concerned it was everywhere.

It was in my soul weariness and unhappiness. It was in the things I thought about. The world I read of in the papers and saw on the news. The greed and anger I sensed around me every day.

It was in the drinking and the fighting I witnessed at home. The lies people told one another in the pub. The serial unfaithfulness I watched in the Workingman's Club and saw played out amongst my friends.

In every fibre of my being there was a sense that things were not right. Not right in me personally. Not right in the world. It was all, somehow wrong.

This wrongness comes out in Numbers with simple impatience; speaking against God, moaning and groaning. Complaining about the Lord's provision. In John it is the reason Jesus comes in to the world. In Ephesians it is in the very air that we breathe. It controls everything.

This wrongness has a name, the name I discovered and which clarified my thinking. That name is Sin.

It's not a name widely spoken anymore. It has fallen into disrepair, disrepute. We are uncomfortable with it. But Lent is the time it's called out. It's the time that the name which must not be spoken ... is called.

Lent is the time we remember, that it doesn't have to be like this.

So, when it was suggested to me that all this wrongness that I was feeling, all of it about myself and the world could be resolved, I jumped at it. The thought that this wasn't how things were meant to be was a revelation, a bolt of pure light and joy into a very dark and grim void. It broke open my life and offered the possibility of more life. The idea that Jesus had come in to the world to take this wrongness away, for everyone, but more importantly at the time, for me ... was literally too good to be true.

That my relationship with Janet didn't have to go the way of my parents or my friends, that there might be hope beyond the day-to-day grind of what we were living and knowing, that my getting lost in a haze of drugs and sex weren't the only things worth living for.

This wrongness had a name ... sin ... and in its naming was liberation, but in its dealing with ... was wholeness. For me and for all.

It wasn't just what I was doing, and I was doing plenty wrong. It was the air that I was breathing, the ground I was walking on, the water I was swimming in.

Our readings for today tell us how this has been put right.

Put right by a bronze serpent lifted high on a pole. To heal. To make whole.

Put right by God who loved us so much that he sent Jesus in to the world so that we would believe in him and be healed, be made whole.

Put right by God's gift to us. To heal. To make whole.

This is the message of Lent, the hope of Easter, the salvation of the world ...

That the wrongness we feel, about whatever is wrong, has been put right ... by God in Jesus Christ.

It is God's pure and unworked for gift ... to us all.

I knew that I was a sinner.

I still do ...

but the power that wrongness had over me... is now gone.

Thanks be to God.