**Lent – 40 Acts of giving**

I want to speak about giving, because Lent is upon us in a few days and I hope many of us will want to do something about keeping Lent this year. Usually we associate this part of the church's year with giving things up. I heard someone saying they were going to have another go at giving up chocolate. Another go! Yes, it is difficult when you like something and maybe you enjoy your little bit of a nibble every day. You manage to give it up for a few days but then, when there's no one about, you break off a bit from your Cadbury’s bar and enjoy the secret sense of having almost kept to your decision. The trouble is that first time always leads to another time and, before you know where you are, you are back on the daily piece or pieces of chocolate. That's the problem for us all. We give in to temptation and then just give up trying to keep the promise we made to ourselves.

I want to suggest to you another kind of giving for Lent - not giving up, but giving away. Some years ago, I was going up to London from York and found myself with a very agreeable travelling companion. We talked quite a bit and the train sped on through Selby and slowed into Doncaster.  At this point, my companion opened a capacious handbag and offered me some chocolate. Immediately, my early Lent resolution about giving up things that I like sprang into action. I began to apologise as I declined. I muttered something about Lent and how difficult it was to keep resolutions. I remember saying it was rather like trying to keep New Year resolutions!  That didn't get me off the hook, however, because she then said she resolved to share things this Lent and I would be helping her to keep her Lenten resolve if I accepted some of her chocolate. Oh dear! What should I do? If fact, it led to a very happy discussion about giving up and giving away. In the end, I felt the kind thing to do was to accept the chocolate and enjoy it.

Now it transpired in conversation that she was a member of an Elim Church in York, somewhere behind Stonegate, and the congregation there had signed up to something called 40 Acts. This is an international group of churches who wanted to change the usual way of keeping Lent and give it a purpose to help individuals and society in general. Those who signed up to this movement promised that in each of the 40 days of Lent they would give away or give something to help other people. It was a church-based thing and had grown quickly. It was started in this country though I had never heard of it. I must say I liked what she told me about it.

A member of her church wanted to go on a course to become a tiler, but it was very expensive. The church knew he was keen but lacked funds, so they clubbed together  
and over the 40 days they collected enough money to pay for his course and spare cash to buy the necessary tools and equipment. The man is now happily employed and doing well.

My travelling companion’s capacious handbag was a treasure store. She had in it a folded mackintosh to give to anyone she came across who might be caught in a heavy shower. Then she had a tin of sticking plasters, as she often met people who needed a bit of patching up, as she put it. The large handbag had so much in it and she was quite prepared to give things away to anyone who needed the help she could give. I discovered she was sensible and didn't include money in her giving away. She kept money for corporate needs which were sponsored by the church. I learned a lot from that conversation and I can see the importance of giving out or giving away as something really positive for Lent.

So I commend it to you. Let giving up become giving away for Lent. My travel companion told me that you would be surprised at the way people respond in gratitude at the time; you will be even more surprised at the response you might get quite a long time after your Lent give away. It will do your heart good to know that such a simple thing was so encouraging, so helpful and so spiritually rewarding.

More than that, you were following in the steps of our Lord whose giving knew no bounds and who is significant for all time and for everybody.