

The number 40 in the Bible is symbolic of a period of testing. Just as Noah's faith was put to the test of 40 days and nights of rain, the children of Israel being tested in the wilderness for 40 years, and Jesus' fasting of 40 days before he began his public ministry. Lent lasts for 40 days where we 'give up' or 'take up' something in prayerful reflection.

Today's gospel reading from Matthew begins at v40

Rick Warren wrote a devotional book called 40 days of purpose.

Apparently the year 40AD was a leap year

There is the World Vision - 40hr famine

We say we'll catch 40 winks when we take a short nap in the afternoon and we listen to the top 40

countdown songs on the radio

Psalms 40 happens to be one of my favourite psalms (for reasons I'll explain later)

And then there is the WD40 that when sprayed stops squeaks and lubricates

And of course 40 is the natural number to follow 39 and precede 41

And 3 years ago we celebrated 40 years of the UCA I've turned 40, (and a bit more) as have most of you, and some have celebrated or are about to celebrate 2 40's

But...what is after 40?

Life begins at 40 we say and it was the 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who started this off by saying "The first forty years of life give us the text: the next thirty supply the commentary."

One writer reflects on her 40th birthday and getting older and feeling the aches and strains of sport injuries and thinking as 40 approaches "what else will happen?"

That is a good question for us as the church and as individual members of the Body of Christ. Life after 40?

The writer goes on saying "As the months whizzed by and I crept closer and closer to my birthday, I busied myself by organising a big party. I invited lots of guests – probably too many. As a result, I really didn't have time to chat properly with my guests and enjoy myself on the night. The party ended up being a bit of a blur for me. At the end of the night, I wearily

slumped into bed. When I woke up the next morning, nothing was different and nothing had changed, apart from a huge sense of relief that I was finally 40. After all the build-up, all the expectations of change and growing old, it had finally happened – and I was left to wonder, "what happens now?"

She then reflects on the UCA

"Life after 40 has been good to me. It is still a journey, don't get me wrong, but it has delivered so many surprising new joys. There's a lot to be excited about. The Uniting Church now finds itself in a similar situation. The Church has journeyed for 40 years – we've made some mistakes, we've learnt valuable lessons, and we've certainly been tested.

What is life on the other side of 40 going to look like for us? Now is our chance to seize the opportunities that turning 40 provides. It's our time, as a Church, to reflect on our past experiences and venture towards that new place, the fertile land, the place that bears new fruit. Let us not be fearful about the lead up to this birthday, but wait in enthusiastic anticipation of what life might present us, once we have celebrated this significant milestone."

And so I turned to the Bible, inspired by this number 40 and flicked over to psalm 40, and because it's one of my favourite, because the best pop band in the world, U2 wrote a song called 40 which is based on this psalm.

The Edge, the name of U2's lead guitarist says about the origin of the song "40"

"So then we had this slightly unusual piece of music and we said, 'OK, what are we going to do with it?' Bono (the front man/lead singer) said, 'Let's do a psalm.' Opened up the bible and found Psalm 40. 'This is it. Let's do it.' And within forty minutes we had worked out the last few elements for the tune, Bono had sung it, and we mixed it. And literally, after finishing the mix, we walked out through the door and the next band walked in." - The Edge, U2 By U2 2006

So inspired by U2 and Psalm 40 I bring you a reflection today on life after 40.

I don't want to take this text out of context, but simply use it as an offering to reflect upon life after 40 as looking at the past, present and future.

Psalm 40 begins with; I waited patiently for the Lord. The first 3 verses are past tense, I waited, he inclined, heard, drew me up, set, put an new song in my mouth

We can look back and note where and how God has led, provided, sustained, motivated, challenged. Its easy to look back, into history and say 'yeh we did good!' or yeh we made mistakes or got it wrong.. this psalm is a song/prayer about a past trouble, the writer was in the pit, the miry bog, but was rescued and set upon firm footings

Vs 4-5 reflect a life in the present tense, life now, a song of thanks. A recognition that life goes on and we don't sit in the past. We learn from the past, we grow, but we don't stay there. That is perhaps one of the central understandings of the UCA and the Basis of Union, that as a church as a people we are a pilgrim people always on the way. Life after 40. Life in witness, praise and service to the God who calls forth into new beginnings, into resurrection life or in the words of Jesus of Nazareth 'life in all its fullness'

Then vs 6-8 asks a very important question. 'what is the future? What is after 40? Or, "what happens now" These verses in Psalm 40:6-8 echo I think very closely that other great Hebrew text from the Prophet Micah 6: 6-8

Psalm 40: 6-8 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. ⁷ Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

Micah 6: 6-8 With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy/kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Here is the call, that we don't get caught up in arguments and battles about our religion or our styles of worship or even denominations but to have an open ear and a heart for the Gospel of God as the prophet Micah encourages and pleads (do justice/act/work//make happen) live kindness/ heart of love – God love- a heart for the other, the neighbour) walk humbly /worship/devotion/prayer/commune)

What that looks like in the future is unknown but its got to start/continue with that open ear and humble heart in response to the grace and love of the triune God.

Don't know what the next 4 minutes let alone the next 40 hours, days, months or years will bring

I don't think the future is so much about growing numbers or planting churches, for I think that will take care of itself, after all the church is not ours but that of Jesus Christ.

Our future response, our life after 40 is being faithful to the call of Christ to be witnesses to the Good news of Jesus Christ, the call to love practically and be agents of peace, love, reconciliation, forgiveness and welcoming community.

Maintain faith, grow in understanding and kindness, and continue to worship, witness, and work for justice and kindness here and beyond, wherever we are.

So 'what happens now?' what happens now is that we continue to walk in the Spirit of God's leading as the gathered and dispersed community, fed and sustained in worship, sacraments, and hospitality and are called and sent out to be the people of God where God calls and sends.

The church buildings may still be closed, but the church is alive and well away from the buildings.

And so the final word comes from the writer of psalm 40 who sings and declares

¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.