

“Remember: ‘dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’” The chilling words of the ashing service which starts Lent.

Yes, I’m in a right chirpy mood today! No, really - I am, for Lent is a time to get to know ourselves a bit better. For instance, for years I was convinced that if I thought myself taller than 5”8” I would be. The truth was that I wasn’t (in fact I’ve actually shrunk about an inch and a half since I was 18) and once I eventually accepted the truth of it, I was able to feel so much more comfortable with the life I do have.

It was the same with accepting my condition as a sinner. Yes, I know that calling someone a sinner seems a very old fashioned thing to say. However, believe me: I was - and still am! Now I accept the very state of who I am, it’s easier to know why I need God’s forgiveness; and knowing I need it, I can ask for it; and asking, I receive. Again quite an old fashioned thing to say but I’ve noticed over the years that the happiest people are the ones who don’t spend a lot of time making excuses, chasing down others to blame for their own mistakes or ill fortune. They are also usually the most efficient people, too.

Modern thinking might refer to this as objectivity. That would be too simple an explanation; neither does it allow our conscience to reset for a new start. An amazing thing, too, is the reaction that people have to their being forgiven: they tend to be more likely to forgive others, are less judgemental, happy with what is good in their own life and the good in others. (Eg, see Luke 7, vss 41-47. No Bible? Call me.)

Admitting to being only the height I was once freed me up to fulfil my potential in appropriate levels in the boxing ring and in the right place on the rugby field (the bruises from which also allowed me to recognise others more skilled!). Admitting to being a sinner freed me up to recognise that there’s so much more to being who I am than just a pointless start and finish in dust.

The last word, then, to Popeye: “I y’am what’s I y’am...” - ?!
No, of course that’s not the last word! That goes to Jesus: “...the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Wouldn’t you like some of that? This Lent let Jesus introduce you to your real self.