

There have been some pretty memorable TV adverts for breakfast cereals over the years. Among them is the 1990s ad campaign for Kellogg's Corn Flakes: "Kellogg's Corn Flakes - Taste them again for the first time."

It's genius, really--a call to go back to relive the pleasure, the delight, the satisfaction of a product which may have lost its luster in your mind, and is not on your shopping list anymore because may be you have been tempted by a more up to date version and when you do finally buy cornflakes you realise that they really do still taste good. The original breakfast cereal, all others have tried to copy.

Today in our reading we hear:

*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp-stand from its place*

John is told to write to the Church in Ephesus, their deeds are known, their hard work and perseverance are noted, they're hardships and sufferings for their faith have not gone unnoticed and they have not grown weary.

It sounds to me like a good community of faith to be part of. So what was wrong with it?

It's a bit like the good news bad news lines that we start some meetings with. The good news is that you are a hardworking, persevering Church, you haven't grown weary working but the bad news is that you have forsaken your first love.

We are being told to go back to the beginning, like that box of cornflakes that had been overtaken by the new distraction, reflect on our relationship with God.

At times we can be so busy in Church. There are all the meetings. The rotas, the groups, the fundraising. Or there used to be these.

There are so many distractions in life that take us away from our relationship with God. We are well intentioned and we work for God, don't we? ... That's good!! And it is if we are growing with God and building our relationship with him but our reading today tell us that the right relationship with God is where we start and all the other honourable things like serving and working will be done with the right attitude.

What does that look like?

I can only speak for myself. I grew up in Church, I've never known a time when I did not know about God. I was baptised as a small baby and made my profession of faith when I was 16.

I knew about God.

Greg Boyd says in his book present perfect finding God in the now

*“In our relationship with Christ the important question is not did I surrender my life to Christ once but the important question is am I surrendered to Christ now in this moment because in life we only have this moment.”*

Relationships need work, we can't just meet someone and then put no work into to it. Relationship is a two-way process.

If we profess faith in God and then forget all about that, then we might wonder why we never get to know God.

At 16 I knew all the knowledge of God but I never really knew God. It has taken years to get to that point and even at the point of ordination I still had loads to learn. Every day is a school day.

Maybe you're like me and you can get caught up in a book or work or family and the day seems to disappear. That time with God in the morning seems so far away. It's not that you wanted to go the day without remembering him.

In this enforced slow down it gives us time to get back to that place where we thought about God and took our whole life to him and prayed throughout the day.

Brother Lawrence in his book 'Practicing the Presence of God' says:

“We must know before we can love. In order to know God, we must often think of Him; and when we come to love Him, we shall then also think of Him often, for our heart will be with our treasure.”

Brother Lawrence suggests that we try to remember God as often as we can. To set reminders, to put objects in our way to remember God, like a stone in your pocket or a band on your wrist. So that we get into the way of remembering. Like members of our family we think of often and don't need reminders to remember. We use these things to help us have God in our consciousness all day.

In these times, when we wonder and have changing situations hourly, never mind daily. It is encouraging to know that every minute of the day we spend that time with God, God who really wants us to get to know him, be surrounded by his love, who walks with us through all of this crisis.

We're asked to reflect on that first love of God we experienced and to never forget that it wasn't a one off event in our life but love that would last a whole life time, if we work on that relationship.

I have been encouraged through this time, although we can't meet people or worship in person. We still support each other, we still meet all be it virtually and we can't run around and work and go to meetings that achieve nothing. We have time to go back to the real fundamentals of our faith.

To love God and to enjoy being in fellowship with him.

Everything has been stripped away, it's a bit like early Church for us right now. Finding a way through a time when there is no map to navigate. Like the Church in Ephesus we are called back to our first love. To take time to heal and be restored, to be with God and to learn what we are meant to be as a community of God.

To be rooted and grounded in God and to be ready for the next steps.

We are still called to support each other, to love our neighbours even more so now. And we can only do that when we seek God throughout our day. To draw on his strength and courage and love.

When we draw on God's love, one who is love, then we can love others with the greatest love. God is patient with us, he waits until we think of him, he waits until we come back. Like the prodigal we run toward us and even at this time when we can have no contact with each other, what better way to see him as running towards us and being ready to hug us.

Go back to your first love. "Turn back! Recover your dear early love."