"Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" Wasn't that something of a strange question for the disciples to ask? We are told that it was the disciples (plural) that asked the question. That sounds like all of them, not just one or two. Was this down to competition between them, or what was going on?

Remember that what Matthew calls the Kingdon of Heaven, the other gospel writers call the Kingdom of God, because Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, respects the Jewish tradition of not referring to God by name. So their question was, if we, the disciples, are living in the Kingdom of God now, which Jesus had been teaching them that they were, where are we in the pecking order? And to some extent there appeared to be a pecking order within the disciples. Jesus, when he went up the mountain for the Transfiguration – which happened in the previous chapter of Matthew that we have skipped, took Peter James and John with him – not the other nine. James and John were brothers, but Jesus didn't take Peter's brother, Andrew. We have heard about Matthew's calling, but we don't hear anything else about him. And what about Simon the Zealot, and the other Judas? At least some of the disciples were clearly concerned that they were being left behind perhaps?

But of course, we all now know, that they shouldn't have been worried. The problem was that the disciples still hadn't understood what sort of Messiah Jesus was. They were thinking what they had been brought up to believe.

That the Messiah when he came would be a conquering hero who would defeat the occupying Romans and lead Israel to a glorious victory. And within that glorious victory, within this new Kingdom of Heaven, they were jostling for position. James and John's mum, Mrs Zebedee, would join in and ask Jesus to find a special place for her boys. Do you know even when they got to the Upper Room for what we now call the Last Supper, there was still bickering and arguing at the table. "Who's going to betray you?" "John you say you're his favourite you ask him?" Even Judas Iscariot, "It can't be me?"

And Jesus' response to all this - "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." In fact the strict translation is "like little children". So we are not talking teenagers trying to find their way in the world and being influenced by their peers, but we are talking about little children who still are able to see things in simplistic terms. That love that little children have for their parents is what Jesus wants us to have for him. And what I would like to suggest this morning is that this is what we should be striving for in Lent.

Each of us expresses love in a different way, and each of us will have a different relationship with God, and I am not going to stand here this morning and tell you how you should be expressing that love. Church is a very special sort of family. For many of us the only thing we have in common is our faith. It is often said that you will never find a more varied group of people enjoying each other's company than you will in a church.

And that is simply because God calls each and every person in this amazing world to follow him. And, to go off track slightly, that is why I struggle a bit with the whole concept of church unity. There are some people who can only worship God by singing worship songs with a band playing, that some people would consider was maybe just a tad too loud, and other people who worship

God in silence. There are some people who would consider that if a sermon was under an hour they have been short changed and others who are finding the pew terribly uncomfortable once the homily goes over 3 minutes. We are all different, and we need to express that difference in our worship. And by the way, there are many of us who try to walk that scary tightrope that goes down the middle of all those views!

But, having said all that, what I want to do is to talk about how each and every one of us, should try and do something very similar, and that is to find our own way through the season of Lent.

The first Sunday of Lent is always a good time for us to look at ourselves, and look at our way forward. The good thing about Lent is that it lasts for 40 days we don't count Sundays, which means we have a real opportunity to consider, perhaps, where we are with God, without having to rush into making any changes to our lives. I called this sermon A Lent Path because that is how I see how Lent.

Yes, Lent can be a good time for abstaining – perhaps we think it will help us in our connection with God if we give up something we really enjoy, and if you haven't yet and think, perhaps I ought to, then it's not too late. Let's be honest, Lent is a period of time invented by humans, not by God, even though that time is linked to Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, so if you want to give something up for a week, and at the end of the week you feel you have achieved what you set out to, then that's fine.

But I do see this 6½ weeks as a time when we can think things through – hence – my Lent path. For a good part of the year I wear a stole that has a path on it. [CLICK] The ideas behind my stoles were put together by Kate and I when I was ordained, and the green stole – ordinary time – is the one I wear most and what is in the middle of it – a path leading to a rainbow and the sun, representing the Kingdom of God, and flying above is a dove, representing the Holy Spirit. Paths are important. This path is one which I am hear to encourage people to travel along, and to help them on the way.

But paths are also interesting things. You take the churchyard here in Foxton. For years people have cut across the churchyard from just past the Main door to the far corner by the car park entrance. They have created a path of their own and that is, in effect, stopping part of the church yard being used for its main purpose. By building a new path, and guiding people, they will be safer, particularly on muddy days, the churchyard will look neater, and we will have more useful space. All thanks to a guiding path.

One of the walks Kate and I like to do is from Harston to Barrington. But sometimes you just can't do that [CLICK] – this picture was taken 4 days after Kate tried to do that walk. As you can see, sometimes paths get blocked – perhaps temporarily, but blocked they become.

Sometimes paths become even harder to follow – [CLICK] here the instructions for our walk was "follow the clear footpath" – but this time the path had disappeared altogether.

And perhaps sometime we feel that our lives can go a bit like that – we think we are doing the right things, going in the right direction, and then something gets in the way, makes it harder to carry on, or stops us completely in our tracks. Sometimes we can simply lose our way.

[CLICK] The second part of our gospel reading addresses precisely this point – "If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks! "

But isn't life full of stumbling blocks? I know the official line, so to speak, if you are in danger of committing a sin is to put yourself as distant from that sin as is possible – but that is often not possible. Yes, sometimes it is – if you have a tendency to drink too much then avoid a pub; if you eat too much avoid fast food venues; the list goes on. But so often in life temptation isn't planned – it just happens.

Which is why I chose Psalm 32 as our first reading today, and I would like to suggest that you keep this psalm beside you during Lent, because I think it's a great comfort and support. You have it in your notice sheets. So let's have a quick look at it.

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that the psalmist has been ill with some sort of wasting disease. The nights have brought him no relief as he tosses on his bed with a raging temperature. His suffering has been all the greater because he saw it as the result of his own sin. He doesn't say what the nature of that sin was – was it perhaps a wrong relationship with someone else, a lack of forgiveness on his part towards someone who had wronged him? At last, he knows what to do – perhaps he knew all along. He will make a clean breast of it – he will no longer conceal his guilt, he will confess his sin to the Lord (verse 5). God has been there all along – a 'hiding place', a 'guard', surrounding him with, 'the glad cries of deliverance'. He started his psalm, before telling us his problems, by saying he can be 'happy'. What a relief! Forgiveness is the most therapeutic power in the world.

And then he hears the patient voice of God. Verse 8. I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. But don't be obstinate. Verse 9 could easily be translated as saying – don't be an ass! Or 'Don't mess this up!'.

Who says what in psalms is sometimes tricky to work out. In this psalm 32, it looks like the psalmist is telling us his woes in verses 1-7, God is then speaking to him in verses 8 and 9, and then, having learned his lesson, the psalmist speaks to us in verse 10 and 11:

"Many are the torments of the wicked," says the psalmist
"but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.
Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."

As we 'do' Lent, however we choose to, and there is no right or wrong way, we choose what works for us. But if you can find a path to travel on that leads you to be able to say that last verse, "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart"

to yourself, or to anyone who will listen, then I think you will have found a good path to have taken. Try and read Psalm 32 as often as you can during Lent; watch the psalmist get things wrong; watch the psalmist turn to God; watch the psalmist listen to God's response; and then say those concluding verses. As for whatever else you do during Lent, well that is entirely up to you, and between you and God.

Amen.