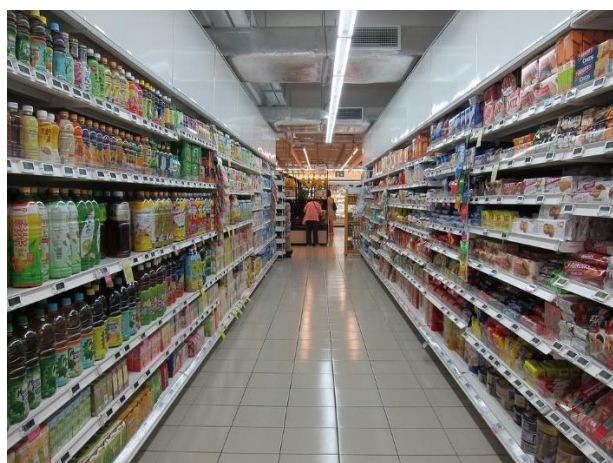


Confessions of a 60 year old sinner:

The challenge was laid down by the Anglican Church to give up single-use plastics for Lent. Many of those reading this will be familiar with suggestions such as bringing your own bag when out shopping and taking reusable cups into coffee shops to help combat plastic waste. I was aware of the Fifth Mark of Mission as laid down by the Anglican Church: 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'. The [Plastic-Less Lent challenge](#) seemed to dovetail well with this and I didn't foresee any major problem in stepping up to the task.

What came as a greater challenge was to put the theory of a plastic-less life into practice. A simple trip to the supermarket became a headache of negotiation and compromise. Almost every item of food, along with toiletries and household cleaning materials, all seemed to be encased in plastic. Now that the over use of plastic had been highlighted it was as if I was wearing a new pair of spectacles and could see more clearly than ever before but I felt terribly embarrassed that my shopping basket illustrated that I couldn't resist plastic in all its forms.



A bar of soap replaced my usual shower gel, followed by the purchase of bars of shampoo and conditioner (I was unaware of the latter before the challenge began). The next step was to reflect on the nature of each item made from plastic which I would regularly throw away and replace. Such items as washing up brushes, plastic sponges, toothbrushes, bin liners and washing up bowls came under scrutiny and bamboo toothbrushes, cotton cloths and beeswax wraps were encouraged. I was disappointed to discover that fleece

garments, (manufactured from recycled plastic) shed microplastics when laundered thereby polluting rivers and seas. A return to natural fabrics was generally encouraged and I began to reflect on the use of language such as 'disposable' and 'throw away' it seems that there is no magical place called 'Away' and recycling requires valuable resources. It is simply better that we use and waste less.

I followed with interest the Facebook group, ['Plastic-Less Lent'](#), learning new ways to manage life without plastic but it was not an easy journey. Many of the ideas suggested a return to basics, encouraging a reconnection with simple pleasures such as baking bread and the re-purposing of everyday items. Most suggestions required an investment of time. I began to question my current way of life and this also became part of my Lenten journey. There were busy days when I would still succumb to the temptation of a microwave meal and those days when for convenience, I would pick up soft fruit in a plastic carton from the supermarket. I felt sinful but I knew that I needed to keep trying each day whilst recognising that the challenge would remain long after Lent.

I began to share reflections about life less plastic, challenging the use of plastic straws whilst taking note of places where paper straws were provided. David Attenborough had spoken out about plastic waste during the TV programme Blue Planet 2 where the BBC was at its best, utilising stunning

photography to convey a message of urgency in order to save our wonderful yet fragile planet where creatures of land, sea and air were contaminated by plastic. The challenge has been taken up by children as well as those in later years and momentum gathered as The Queen and Buckingham Palace added their voice to publicise the steps they were taking to combat plastic waste.

As Lent progressed I was aware of daily compromise but the good news was that attitudes towards plastic were shifting. A life less plastic was encouraging a life more simple. Social pressure was building and an incredible force for good was emerging. We have seen public water fountains opening up in London, a new rise in demand for doorstep deliveries of milk and the government has now banned microbeads in cosmetics. Discussions are underway for a bottle deposit scheme to be introduced in England. McDonalds are to ditch plastic straws, Starbucks are to fund multimillion pound research to produce a fully recyclable cup and Waitrose will phase out disposable cups by autumn.



The 'Plastic-Less Lent group' (on facebook) has been renamed the '[Plastic-Less Living group](#)', a natural progression as folk journey on beyond Lent. No individual has all the answers but by keeping our hearts and minds open we can challenge and encourage one another. We may support small independent businesses and also challenge supermarkets and superstores in their over use of plastic.

Finally, it is good to reflect on the next generation following in our footsteps on this fragile Earth and to grasp this opportunity to work together. Lent 2018 has been a personal struggle but Easter has brought with it the Good News that we are a community of Easter people, full of hope who may together strive to be worthy stewards of this wonderful planet which has been entrusted to us by God.

Anita Shaw (Environment Champion for the Leeds Area)