

Luke 4v1-13 Sermon.

4 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' 4 Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'

5 Then the devil[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil[b] said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' 8 Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'

9 Then the devil[c] took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", 11 and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'

12 Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

This week is the start of Lent, and I have to admit my heart always sinks slightly. Giving things up but not sure why, it turns into a feat of endurance, and almost inevitable failure. In fact isn't that a metaphor for what many people think Christianity is. However in recent years I'm starting to discover the joy of this season, and it comes from understanding it better.

Lent is one of the two great fasts before the great feasts - along with advent it is a time of preparation for what is to come. It is 40 days long and specifically echoes this Jesus 40 days in the wilderness. At lent we are invited to enter the wilderness too.

Now we think of Jesus time in the wilderness as a hardship, and it was certainly serious. But if you have been on retreat you will know it is also joyful. Living more simply allows us to appreciate simple everyday blessings, to see the beauty of creation and the peace of solitude.

In fact if you would like a motto to hold on to for Lent, something to print out and place over your door perhaps it could be Isaiah 30:15 *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength"* Repentance, Rest, Quietness and trust. That is a lovely summary of Lent. You see much of our difficulties stem not from not trying hard enough, but from the fact that we are hyperactive, wrapped up in all the business and distractions of life so that we cannot see clearly.

Jesus retreats into the wilderness for 40 days of solitude, fasting, prayer, nature, silence, contemplation. And we are invited to follow him. So switch off from the distractions, make some time each day. It is a time to deepen your walk with God and a place where our heart is revealed to us.

However, it is significant that at the end of this time, Jesus faced a time of testing. And times of retreat are not necessarily always easy - sometimes they can be a struggle. It may mean being confronted with difficult things about ourselves, and often we struggle just to be still.

So let's think more about our passage and the three temptations Jesus faces. I've heard lots of sermons on this, and never felt they have got to the heart of it. I think the key to understanding what is going on here is how Jesus responds - he references three key stories from the Exodus narrative, linked to three temptations or tests that they faced. Isn't that interesting - Jesus goes into the wilderness and reenacts the the People of Israel traveling from Egypt to the promised land. And that isn't just symbolic. He is genuinely tempted and

yet is faithful where they failed. And these temptations are common to Jesus, Israel and all humanity.

1) The temptation to try to be in control of our future. - v4 *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

The first temptation is a reference to the story of manna in the desert -(Deuteronomy 8:3) you remember God provided for them one day at a time, and if they tried to store up more, it would go rotten. It is that theme of trusting God with the day to day. And trusting him for the future. We want to be in control of our future secure. So the temptation is to use what power you have to serve yourself, to hoard resources, and to be in control. But the irony of that is that it only brings worry. And robs us of the ability to see the blessings and joys of today. It is echoes in the Lords prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" and teaches us to chose gratitude for today, and to place into Gods hands our tomorrows.

2) The Temptation, when you get comfortable, to forget God.

v8 *Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'*

The reference is to Deuteronomy 6v10-12, and it is a warning about when they get to the promised land, and they have all they need, that they don't forget God, and end up worshipping other things. In the midst of the wilderness it is obvious that you need to trust in God - there is little else you can trust in. But the challenge to faith is when we get comfortable, and we look at all that we have, and all we have achieved and think "I did this". And we put your trust in things that are not God and security in that which can't last, and we turn our backs on God.

3) The temptation to forget the evidence that you are loved.

v7 *"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

The third response is from a less well known story about the Israelites wanting God to prove his love for them by providing for their needs on demand. (Exodus 17:7) not satisfied with the past evidence that he loves them. The parallels is a relationship where you don't trust that the other person loves you and need constant reassurance. Our temptation is to be dissatisfied with God because he doesn't give us what we want, forgetting all the blessing we already have and the greatest blessings of all. Because ultimately the the proof that we are loved is the cross. That is enough. But we need to trust it.

Three temptations that are all about faith. Three ways that the Israelites struggled to practically put their trust in God, three ways that Jesus proved himself to be faithful, and three challenges to our faith. And they are all very practical - faith is not an abstract theological belief - it is about how we live day to day.

And so this is what we enter into at Lent

Not simply self denial, but self discovery, revealing our trues selves before God and finding liberation in the process. Freed from the illusion of control, believing that we are loved, living day by day by faith as we are intended to.

Conclusion

You are invited to enter the wilderness this lent. To simplify, to strip back some of the distractions, to make some time to pray and be silent, to give up some comforts, or take up a discipline. Because your faith is the most precious thing you have , more precious than gold. Come away to a quiet place says the Lord, and allow that faith to be deepened, clarified and tested.