

Sermon First Sunday in Lent

21/02/10

Gospel

Luke chapter 4:1-13

‘Jesus full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the Wilderness.’ Luke’s gentle words whereas in Mark’s Gospel after the heaven has opened, the Spirit descends on Jesus, a voice says You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased. Then immediately Jesus was **driven out** into the wilderness.

Those of you who have been to the Holy Land will know what the wilderness is like. It is very stony, barren with very little food or water to be found. So why did the Spirit lead Jesus into such a place? He was there for 40 days and he ate nothing during that time. He was there to build up his relationship with his Heavenly Father through prayer and fasting.

Our overall theme for this lent is to be our relationships with God and with each other.

As those of us here last Wednesday heard Stuart say Lent 100s of years ago was observed by those preparing for baptism which only occurred once a year at Easter. But now most Christians try and observe a Lenten discipline.

It has become a time of spiritual renewal, a time for taking stock, a time to consider what our relationship is with our Heavenly Father.

I believe relationships are core to what it means to be human

Jesus went into the wilderness knowing he was accepted and loved by God.

Paul says that one of the prime functions of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us that we belong to God. In his letter to the Ephesians he says 'So, then the Holy Spirit will lead us into the same childlike relationship with God as his son Jesus and will call us to grow up in the same way as Christ to full maturity of manhood and womanhood. (4:13)

Just like Jesus we have 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday (and yes I have counted them) to allow the Holy Spirit to deepen our relationship with our heavenly Father before we begin the rigours of Holy Week and Christ's Passion.

If God wants to impress something on me he usually puts things in my way. It pops up in my reading, comes up on the radio or television or crops up in conversations. After a while it dawns on me...!

This is exactly what has been happening to me over the last few weeks.

Once a month some of us go the Acorn Healing Centre at Whitehill Chase for their service of wholeness and healing. Last month I was unable to go as I was unwell so we rearranged to go down on Feb 9th.

I was glad to be going as I still wasn't 100% and thought it would be good to have prayer with laying on of hands.

As the speaker started I knew The Lord had brought me here on this particular day because he wanted me to hear the message.

He was saying that rather than seek God's hand we need to seek his face. So often in our prayers we are asking God for

something for ourselves or for someone for whom we care deeply. We know he gives abundantly and so we continue to seek his hand. We know he is a loving God and wants to protect us we almost take him for granted. The Israelites did it when they were wandering in the wilderness and we still do it today.

Being in the wilderness is scary and frightening, even dangerous so we are too busy seeking his hand for protection and help. We fail to accept that he is almighty a God of love who wants desperately to have a real relationship with us.

He needs us to seek his face to know that we are accepted and loved by him. God is not like the world waiting for us to earn his blessings and powers.

During my quiet times relationships with God and with each other have come up several times recently!

The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to explore the sustaining presence of God more deeply.

If we are truly listening to the Holy Spirit she is far more likely to call us to be quiet so that we can learn to give up our knee jerk responses to pressures and expectations to enable us to do the will of God more perfectly.

Just over a week ago we had Marriage preparation for all the couples who are to be married in St. Mary's throughout the year. Our main emphasis is on communication. We give the couples the opportunity to discuss together some of the issues such as feelings, conflict, love and general looking after each other emotionally, spiritually and physically. Giving permission to allow time and space for each other

without outside influences such as television and the computer.

Last Monday I was listening to thought for the Day by the Revd Dr. David Wilkinson principal of St. Johns College Durham. He mentioned that it was the birthday of Utube which had started 5 years ago to the day Feb 15 and also earlier in the month it had been the 6th birthday of Face Book.

For those of you like myself, who are digital Aliens, Face Book helps you connect and share with the people in your life. With Utube you can upload videos to share what is going on in your life at the moment.

I've called myself a digital Alien because I don't do Face Book or Utube. But there are many digital immigrants among us who are enjoying learning and interacting with people in this way. Increasingly there will be the youngsters in our midst who are native to this technology.

A conference was held where 60 people who are leading voices in this world of technology were brought together. They talked about being very good friends but this was the first time they had met.

A very different culture to the one I'm used to.
But that doesn't mean that it's wrong, just different.

Mind you I would hate to think of married couples communicating in this way, but who knows!!!

Whether through technology or face to face it's giving each other time showing the other they are loved and accepted for who they are, not for what they can give us.

Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit where he deepened his relationship with his Father to the point even when he was tempted he was able to hold firm.

The Desert Fathers are probably the closest people doing what Jesus did, giving up every thing and going into the desert to live as hermits to come closer to God.

The silence would have been deafening, challenging and even frightening. Just as for us today.

Some of us are going on retreat next weekend and the thought of spending a lot of time in silence we found very scary. We will be having some times of silence and some times of talking which for us is building up relationships and fellowship with others on the retreat.

We have to remember that life is a gift and we only have one go at it so we want to make it the very best we can. If our relationship with God deepens then so will our relationship with each other.

Jesus was able to resist the temptations because he had been communing with his father seeking his face.

We need to turn our thinking around (repent)not just as individuals but as Christ's body worshipping here this morning. We need to be seeking his face rather than his hand perhaps taking steps into the unknown knowing that's God is already there -Immanuel - God with us and he loves us.

So like Jesus let the Holy Spirit lead us through Lent, our wilderness. Unlike Jesus we will fail and fall short. But we

know we have a gracious loving merciful Father who will always be there for us.

Let us pray

Heavenly Father during this time of Lent as we read, fast and pray help us to reconnect with you, to seek your face to give our relationship time to deepen so that we will see you more clearly love you more dearly and follow you more nearly day by day.

Amen