

"We are prepared" was preached by Gary Anderton at St John with St Mark, Bury on Sunday 1st March 2020. It's based on [Matthew 4:1-11](#). Gary is an Ordinand on placement with us until Easter.

Introduction

I was looking at an internet poll the other day on the top 10 things people had said they were giving up for Lent. I'm going to share with you the results, in reverse order:

- 10. Fizzy drinks
- 9. Coffee
- 8. Sweets
- 7. Meat.
- 6 made me chuckle, number 6 was School (I think they must have had a young audience)
- 5. Facebook
- 4. Twitter
- 3. Alcohol
- 2. Social Networking, and
- 1. Can anybody guess... Chocolate

It's interesting how people think about these things...

Giving up?

I was asked by a friend and colleague, Judith, the other day, what are you giving up for lent? Before I could offer my reply, Judith told me she was giving up cakes and (our number 1 on the list) chocolate. Which if you know Judith like I do, it will probably be a bit of a struggle. It will be especially hard, because all of the chocolate and cakes are usually put at the end of her desk. It won't be easy with **temptation** in her way, but i'm sure she'll manage.

Sometimes people will tell me what they are going to do *extra* for Lent. "I'm going to exercise more", "I'm going to say nice things to people I don't really like". But where does Lent actually come from? What does it mean to us?

Is it really about punishing ourselves by being deprived of something that we really like, or doing something extra that will make us feel good? Lent isn't just about us. It's about us and our relationship with God.

If we are giving something up, or doing something extra to make our lives more meaningful, we should be mindful of how it brings us closer to God. It's our time of preparation. Preparing our bodies mind and spirit for what is to come.

With Lent there's no rule book or instruction manual. To be honest, there is no right or wrong. There isn't a passage in scripture that tells us about what we should and shouldn't do during Lent.

What we *do* have is a great example to follow... The forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation in preparation for his ministry and what was to come.

Biblical Text

Our Gospel from Matthew this morning has quite an interesting beginning. It starts with the word, **THEN**. “*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*” The word “Then” tells us that something interesting had just happened before, and indeed it did.

This reading takes place immediately after Jesus was baptised by John in the river Jordan. When the spirit of the lord had descended like a dove “*And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”..... THEN... Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. The same spirit that had descended, moments before was leading him to be tempted in the wilderness.*

Just after God revealed that Jesus was his son, Jesus was spirited away. Whilst in the wilderness Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights he was hungry. This key point is sometimes overlooked, but quite an important part of this story. Jesus was hungry, which I'm sure after 40 days he would have been. He was vulnerable and this is when the tempter acts.

Each time Jesus is tempted, the tempter asks, "If"...."if you are the son of God"... "if you are the son of God"...and "If you would bow down to me". God had made this great proclamation from the heavens for all to hear, and he is still asked "if". The first temptation plays on the weakness of the body, Hunger; which of course Jesus responds with a quotation from the book of Deuteronomy, "*man shall not live off bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*".

Power and authority

The next test is about power and authority - proving he is who he says he is..., but this time the tempter uses a scripture quote of his own. But it is written...Jesus responds with another quote from the book of Deuteronomy.

At the third and last temptation, Jesus was shown all of the kingdoms of the world. He could have them if he bowed down before another. To which Jesus responds with yet another quote from the book of Deuteronomy.

The book of Deuteronomy is the 5th book of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy actually means second law. It is, above all, a reiteration of the laws given by God to the Israelites, after they had spent their 40 years in the wilderness.

Application

Jesus must have felt, tired, hungry and vulnerable and yet he was prepared, ready with his answers. His focus is always toward God and all of the answers were already written. His faithfulness was to God and his Laws.

How many times are we in the wilderness? What does the wilderness look like in our lives? Do we know when we are there? We can find ourselves almost spirited away to our own wilderness when certain events happen in our lives.

When we are in our own wilderness, temptation comes to test us all, it will prey on our weaknesses and often comes when we are most vulnerable. We can sometimes be tempted down the wrong path that might even appear to make sense, that somehow seems right. Like when Jesus was tempted the second time, the devil quoted from scripture to justify his temptation, to try and trick him with what appears to be right.

How many times does that happen to us? How often is the wrong thing justified by what might appear to be right?

Through our prayers and commitment to God we can be prepared! We can gain the knowledge and strength we need to overcome our own temptations. We have access to the answers through God, who is always faithful to us.

Conclusion

Interestingly, this Gospel doesn't feature any other characters. It's just Jesus and the devil. This must have been a direct account told by Jesus to his disciples. His experiences and responses are not only an affirmation that God became fully human in Jesus, who was vulnerable and open to temptation, but it sets for us an example of how we can be strong and resist temptation.

Jesus shared this story to give us our own template on how we can also resist temptation. He taught us which tools we can use, the words of God. To be prepared for when it comes our way, when we are vulnerable. When we're tired, hungry, thirsty, unhappy, grieving with God we are prepared. When we long for the things that we don't have or when least expecting it, with God we are prepared.

During this time of Lent, as we have entered our own wilderness for 40 days; whether we have removed something or we're doing something extra to demonstrate God's love in the world. We should pray for strength for ourselves and with God we can be prepared.

So, like Jesus, our great example, with our trust, faith and commitment to God, we can have our own answers ready.

Our father who art in heaven, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. **Amen**