

Sermon 6th March 2022

The season of Lent calls us, in the words of the prophet Joel, which we heard on Ash Wednesday:

'Yet, even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart'

and in this the first Sunday of Lent, we have an opportunity to consider how much or how little of our heart has been given to God this past year.

And at the same time we have the opportunity to consider how we might implement the Lenten disciplines of prayer and fasting and giving to assist us in our journey back to God.

To a God who invites us always and whatever befalls, to return to her/him with all our hearts

In our gospel reading the fully human Jesus has not turned **from** God but he has reached the point in his journey where he must rigorously engage with what exactly it is he is called to be as 'God made flesh'.

Once he is in the wilderness the first thing we should note, is that Jesus chooses to *stay* until the work of the wilderness is over.

This abiding, this faithfulness *to* the 'wilderness time' may be the first thing we learn from Jesus about the nature of God and becomes therefore, the first quality of God that we are called to imitate.

Presumably Jesus could have walked away from the desert places, but no, he chooses to stay.

So, what does this mean for us and our wilderness experiences?

Jesus, we are told, was *driven* into the wilderness and for sure, we too don't always choose to enter wildernesses, and for sure we struggle when we find ourselves there.

We don't volunteer for pain, loss, danger, or terror.

On the whole, the wilderness happens **to** us.

As we will explore in our Lent Course Jesus also struggles. In the wilderness he faces the difficulties thrown at him and *stays* with them, finding in the temptations the nub of the challenge as to what it is to be God in human form.

Whether wilderness comes to us in the guise of a hospital waiting room, a difficult relationship, a troubled child, a sudden death, a crippling panic attack, the experience of aging, a period of depression the wilderness appears, unbidden and unwelcome, at our doorsteps.

It insists on itself.

Does this mean that God wills bad things to happen to us?

That God wants us to suffer?

No.

Does it mean that God can redeem even the most painful periods of our lives, if we choose to stay and pay attention?

Does it mean that our desert places can become holy even as they remain dangerous?

Yes.

Think, if you can bear to, of some of the examples of faithfulness to love and courage amongst the people of Kiev – surely God is seen there in those moments.

In the midst of the most appalling wilderness people can and do turn to God with all their hearts.

So, what does this mean for us as we begin our Lenten journeys here in safe, leafy Chaldon?

Maybe it means it's time to follow Jesus into the desert and be steadfast there.....if our own lives feel settled can we come alongside those who are experiencing the wilderness first hand?

That depressed or anxious friend, the asylum seeker, the prisoner, the Yemeni mother with no food to offer her child, the local family forced to choose between food or fuel, the lonely elderly neighbour, the exhausted teacher - and of course the people of Ukraine and the families of Russian soldiers.

It is the season of Lent, it's time to stay and look evil in the face, and face it down with love.

To hold fast to Jesus' rejection of power, Jesus rejection of greed and time to pray and fast for our world today.

Time to hear evil's voice, recognize its allure, and confess its appeal.

It's time to decide **who** we are and **whose** we are.

Time to return to God with all our hearts and.....

remember, Lent is *not* a time to do penance for being human, it's a time to embrace all that it means *to be* human.

Human and hungry.

Human and vulnerable.

Human and powerless.

Human and beloved.

DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

In the words of Pope Francis

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.

Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.

Fast from anger and be filled with patience.

Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.

Fast from worries and have trust in God.

Fast from complaints; contemplate simplicity.

Fast from pressures and be prayerful.

Fast from bitterness; fill your hearts with joy.

Fast from selfishness and be compassionate.

Fast from grudges and be reconciled.

Fast from words; be silent and listen.



Hope
amidst
isolation



VICARIATO
DE ORIENTE

