

Sunday February 18th 2024, Lent 1
Christ the King and St John's

Mark 1:9-15

John is baptising people when Jesus comes to him to be baptised. At first John refuses but when Jesus tells him he must be baptised by him John agrees. This is where Jesus begins his ministry and it is shown by Jesus coming up out of the waters of his baptism, the clouds part and a dove, representing the holy spirit, comes down and the voice of God is heard saying this is my son with whom I am well pleased.

But this very same Holy spirit drives Jesus straight out into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days and nights. I find that a very hard concept to understand as it seems God is happy with him, but then decides to test him, see if he is up to the job of the mission he was sent for, or is it the fact he was now an adult in human form here on earth, and would be facing many temptations as he was now going to be fully known for who he was, that one day he would be crucified for our sins.

Even as Jesus was being tempted he was able to recite what we now see as scripture, Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, (Mathew 4 verse 1-4) Then there is --You shall not put the lord your God to test, (Deuteronomy 6 verse 16) also -You shall worship the lord your God and serve him only. (Luke 4 verse 8)

These he told to satan, as he was being tested, Jesus all alone, a servant of God and no human witnesses, alone with the wild animals, yet the Angels waited on him. Seems a strange way for anyone to begin a ministry.

John had been arrested and thrown into prison.

Jesus came out of the desert and went into Galilee and it was here he started proclaiming the good news of God.

His ministry had started and it was now he instead of John that was now, calling people to repentance and to be baptised and believe.

It seems God had made Jesus wait till he turned 30 before starting his ministry, but most of the Rabbis of that time, reached that age before starting on their ministries, I suppose this was so it made Jesus look more like a bona fide Rabbi as they were only seen as mature enough at that age to begin a ministry.

But of course Jesus was known as an "itinerant preacher" because unlike the Rabbis he had no education or training for the role of a minister, he taught and preached freely, yet they could all

see that the words he spoke came directly from God. The word Rabbi in English simply means "Master".

At our Ash Wednesday service this week we received the mark of the cross on our foreheads from the palm crosses of last year that are burnt and blessed. It was an outward sign that we are repentant sinners, starting out in Lent with a clean heart and mind, to help us remember we are now in the season of Lent. The cross on our foreheads is a reminder of our mortality and our failings. Here we see again the 40 days of Lent and it reminds us how after Jesus's baptism he was 40 days and nights in the desert being tempted by the devil.

He was able to resist all the temptations, but can we as we travel on in our Lenten journey?

I know that I have failed so many times of say, trying to give up chocolate or a glass of wine, even promising to read a daily passage in the bible, but at some point or other have let myself down, therefore letting God down by my own selfish ways of, thinking well I just didnt have the time today to sit and read, or its only a little square of chocolate or its a celebration of a wedding etc, surely one glass of wine wont hurt. But of course I said yes instead of No so I let the temptations get the better of me. I had sinned by my own actions.

But I know that as long as I keep trying, keep repenting I will be forgiven by God.

The Lenten season is a time of personal reflection, and also of repentance in preparation of the celebration of easter. This is a very holy time for Christians from many denominations to recognise this holy season of 40 days.

This year I have decided to go easy on myself and when I do my morning prayers to pray for a something I heard the day before from say a neighbour who is worried about something or something I have heard on the radio or read in the paper and these have to be 40 individual prayers, different each day to remind me of the 40 days of Lent. I bring these to mind and pray and offer them to God. I pray for the world each day so this has to be something other than the wars or climate change, so its teaching me to keep my ears and eyes open and also to concentrate a bit more on my prayer life.

This is the freedom God gives us to resist evil, injustice and oppression in what ever forms they present themselves, Lent is a time to remove obstacles and dedicate ourselves anew to grow more Christ like. Jesus showed us the way to face temptations by training ourselves to say NO not just by trying to say NO but really meaning our NO. God wants us to move out of a place of rebellion and into a place of acceptance and joy. Its a time when we can commit ourselves to letting go of the baggage we carry around with us in our hearts, minds and souls, we need to get into a relationship with God our father and in our service to him.

It should be a time just as Jesus did that we start to think about how we are going to go out and share the good news, may be by being a good friend, offering to pray for others who are struggling, maybe text a verse of hope and comfort from the bible to them, invite others to come to a Lent group, or maybe take someone out, and just sit and listen to them. There are lots of ways of sharing out the good news and by doing simple acts it shows you are trying to be a living example of the faith you believe in.

So I wish you a good Lent season and a time of self reflection to get your self ready to take this good news out to others and share it freely and not be afraid to share your faith, admit you have sinned, you have experienced the separation from God by your own foolish actions. But by Christ's death and resurrection he has bought for us, a new eternal life and this salvation is for everyone who repents and turns to him.

Let us pray,

Loving God we commit this season of Lent to you and ask you to show us what we need to turn away from. What we need to turn towards. Shine your loving light in those Dark places in our hearts. Bring new life, new hope, new possibilities. Help us to walk more closely with Jesus, to know that we are deeply loved and to share his love with others. AMEN.