

LENT 2024

JOURNEY to FREEDOM

TUESDAY 26TH MARCH

READ: Matthew 4:1-11

'Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.'

Matthew 4:1

'It's not about you.' That well aimed challenge was voiced at least once daily in my theological college. I questioned it at my ordination. In a packed cathedral the bishop pressed his hands on my head. 'Crikey' I thought. 'This moment really is about me.' I quickly realised it was actually about the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness.

Moses led Israel into the wilderness but they failed to see God's invitation into a deeper relationship. They complained, doubted and sinned. Jesus' relationship with God was affirmed at His baptism. But instead of the doors of ministry bursting open, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness. God uses the wilderness as His crucible for spiritual growth. In this unique environment Jesus' calling is tested. Unlike the old Israel, Jesus, the new Israel, deepens His trust in God's love.

In prayer, now, in Holy Week, we have that opportunity for an encounter; a relationship. Time with God that we needed. If we're honest, we spend a great deal of time being absent from God. Too busy to hear the knocking on the door. Or perhaps tempted. The wilderness is fertile ground for temptation. Those monastic eccentrics, the Desert Mothers and Fathers, were highly aware of the power of temptation. The greatest of them, Anthony of Egypt, said 'Nobody who has not been tempted will be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, for take away temptations and nobody is being saved.' Powerful stuff.

Have courage. In the wilderness Jesus saw that what Satan offered was a false reality. By saying 'no' to false reality, Jesus says YES to being among us and with us, with YOU. Through encountering the wilderness Jesus is revealed: He is fearless, continually saying no to corruption and lies. He gives voice to the voiceless; He will heal, He will bring in the Kingdom.

See how inspiring this wilderness can be!

What are the illusions about myself that need clearing away? How can the Spirit help me discover true self-awareness? This is the time and place to embrace our living relationship with God made possible for us by the Spirit who will lead us to where Jesus stands. We only have to say 'yes.'

The Revd Christopher Wood, Vicar of Waddington and West Bradford