

Hinde Street Methodist Church

10am Sunday 10th March 2019

Revd Val Reid

Luke 4: 1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'

Jesus answered him, 'It is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him." '

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you",

and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sermon

On Friday 15th February fifteen thousand schoolchildren around the UK went on strike.

You may think – any excuse for a day bunking off school.

But this was serious.

In over 60 towns and cities pupils marched protesting about climate change.

'There is no planet B' one placard read.

'Change the system, not the climate'.

It all began in September when 15 year old student Greta Thunberg sat outside the Swedish parliament building on a school day accusing the government of not following the Paris Climate Accord.

Her protest spread around the world.

On Friday – International Women's Day – she was named 'Woman of the year' in Sweden.

Theresa May said the British children were 'wasting lesson time'.

Layla Moran, a Lib Dem MP, and Caroline Lucas of the Green Party requested a debate on climate change in Parliament.

The topic had not been discussed for two years.

On Thursday 28th February, when the debate was scheduled, I saw a picture of an empty house of commons in the paper.

Acres of green leather seats.

Only 10 MPs sat on the government benches.

And just a few more over on the opposition side of the house.

We face a climate emergency, Caroline Lucas said.

Even after all the international pledges, the earth is set to warm by 3-4 degrees.

So why do our MPs seem so uninterested in the crisis?

And our schoolchildren care so passionately?

And what has this got to do with the first Sunday in Lent?

Today we have heard that familiar story of the forty days in the Wilderness.

Forty days without food, so Jesus was famished.

Forty days on his own – time to reflect on what the shape of his ministry will be.

Time to get confused.

To doubt.

To question.

To despair.

Just think about those three temptations.

Luke tells us that Jesus was hungry.

Not just hungry – ravenous.

And he is tempted to turn a stone into a loaf of bread.

This is often spiritualised into a temptation to engage in a ministry of popular miracle-working.

But in Luke's story it's just one stone.

One loaf.

And later Jesus did indeed feed five thousand people, as a sign.

So not a metaphor, then.

This is about meeting my need.

Now.

I'm hungry.

I want.

I can have.

The second temptation is about power.

All the power and the authority of all the kingdoms of the world.

Just worship me, and it will all be yours.

A short cut to glory.

Why bother with all those journeys, all those conversations, all those people who won't listen and don't understand, all those confrontations with the religious and civic authorities, all that suffering, all that dying...

You can have it all.

Here. Now.

The third temptation is about trust.
About Jesus' relationship with God.
About short-circuiting the hard work of walking day by day with his father.
About building up the closeness that only comes with a life-time of companionship.
Do it now.
Prove it now.

Jesus resists all these temptations.
Unlike us, Jesus understands the significance of delayed gratification.
There is no shortcut to redemption.
The only way out is through.
Trying to grab it – whatever 'it' is – because you want it and you can have it;
that is not the way of salvation.

That's a lesson we find it hard to learn.
Here in the 21st century, we can have virtually anything we want, whenever we want it.
We need to learn the Lenten Discipline of not taking it.
Because taking it is destroying our planet.

On Thursday I went for supper with the community in 19 Thayer Street.
I promised I'd take pudding.
I called into Marks and Spencer in the little gap between a lunchtime meeting, and the only hour I had to write this sermon.
I bought a Victoria Sponge cake and some fresh strawberries.
The cake was wrapped in cardboard and plastic.
The strawberries had been flown in to London from Morocco.
They were delicious.

But I didn't think.
What did that pudding cost me? It cost the earth.
I'm not a particularly selfish person.
I do care about stuff.
But I was in a hurry.
I didn't have enough time to cook from scratch.
I needed it now.

And we are all like that.
Well-meaning, responsible individuals who are under too much pressure to take the long view.

Luke tells us that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days.
Just as the people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years.
Like Jesus, they were famished, and wanted bread. Now.
Then the manna wasn't interesting enough and they wanted meat. Now.
Nothing has changed in thousands of years.

Except that now our capacity to get what we want, when we want it, has increased exponentially. Even if it has to be wrapped in plastic and flown half way round the world.

The Joint Public Issues Team has set up a project called 'Living Lent'.

It encourages each of us to choose one thing we will do this Lent which helps our beleaguered planet.

And which reminds us of the discipline of not grabbing just because we can.

I've signed up to not buying anything new for the whole of Lent.

Apart from food, and essential toiletries.

The Facebook Group set up for us all to share our experience has been interesting.

Micky Youngson – our president this year – stockpiled tights on Shrove Tuesday.

Someone else asked what she might do about birthday presents.

Home made things?

Charity shops?

I'm trying to make my own sourdough bread, to avoid plastic wrapped loaves.

But to do this I really need a glass jar for the starter.

Can I buy one new thing to help with reducing my plastic use?

I shared this dilemma with the community on Thursday evening.

'Hang on,' said Rob.

He went out into the kitchen.

Two minutes later he came back with a Tupperware jar.

Perfect.

We were having a conversation about the best and worst things about living in community.

The untidy Tupperware cupboard was the object he had chosen to represent the difficult stuff.

But out of that untidiness had come the very thing I needed.

And now, every time I feed my sourdough starter, I remember the power of community.

Why don't we think like that more often?

There are other challenges – single use plastic, giving up meat, living and shopping locally, thinking about the transport we use, cutting out electricity for an hour a day.

The point is to train ourselves.

To learn that attitude of mind and life which the Benedictines call 'habitus'.

To practice waiting.

Waiting for something new.

Waiting for strawberries till they are in season in this country.

Waiting for things which we want now – but which will damage other lives, other people, other creatures, other habitats, if we just take them.

Because we can.

This seems to be a faith-ful way to approach Lent.

Not just giving up chocolate or coffee or alcohol because it's a penance.

But giving up some of the things we have got used to having.

Because all of us who have, need to learn to give up, in order that we might all survive.

Jesus, as so often, shows us the way.

It's possible to say no.

To trust in the word of God to help us ward off temptation.

To be confident that we can survive the wilderness of not having.

That the spirit which led us here will see us through.

I hope you make a good Lent.

Amen.