

Bennochy church 1st march 2020

My immediate thought was, I have run out of things to say! Don't rejoice too quickly! There is a sermon for today. I looked at the reading for the first Sunday of Lent. By the way, I hope you knew we are now in the season of Lent. We are in the run up to Easter. I looked at the reading for today and wondered what am I going to say that I have not already said, about the temptations of Jesus. I was 'tempted' to look out an old sermon and see if any one noticed. Can I say, I have not done that, but if something I say does sounds familiar, it is probably because I have said it before.

The temptations of Jesus are sandwiched between two key moments in the life of Jesus; his baptism in the Jordan, by John, and the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. That is no coincidence. His baptism confirmed his identity. Who he was. God said, "*You are my son*". And his ministry, which ushered in the imminent Kingdom of God, and there in the middle, before any of that could happen, God offers up Jesus to the temptations of the devil.

The temptations are set in the hardship of the desert, but they are not about the physical, they are about the spirit. They are about Jesus relationship with God. That had to be sorted out before the work of the kingdom could begin. It is almost as if God is putting Jesus in the position of Job, remember him...and saying to the devil, do your worse. I have to see if my son can

cope with temptation, before the real work of the kingdom begins.

Desert places is where spiritual work is done. Speak to the ancient people of Israel as they were tested on their journey out of Egypt to the promised land. Follow the story of Elijah, from defeating the prophets of Baal to meeting God on Mount Sinai. And here, Jesus is taking the same journey.

It reminded me of BBC Breakfast presenter, Louise Minchin, among other celebrities, who is taking part in a 100-mile desert triathlon to raise money for Sport Relief. The original extreme cold trial in Mongolia, was switched to '*The Heat is On*' challenge, in southern Africa, because of the corona virus outbreak. It is a four-day expedition across the Namib Desert, in which they have to walk, cycle and ski to reach a shipwreck on Africa's Skeleton Coast.

People do test themselves. Many for charity. Think of the number of marathons up and down the country; you can abseil from the rail bridge or do a parachute jumps or maybe, you are an adrenaline junky, and you do it, just because it is there to be done. I now have the image of Speedo Mick in my head, who is doing, or has finished his walk, the length of Britain, in his Speedo's. Is he mad, or is he just mad!

These are modern day spiritual journeys. 21st century pilgrimages. And many of these people would say it has nothing to do with the spiritual. Yet in the journey, I am sure they find

out a lot about themselves. Who they are. And in my book, that is spiritual work.

It seems to me that Jesus did not want to go into the desert. Why would he? Given the choice, would you? It is where God wants him to be. He is there long enough to be hungry. 40 is just another way of saying a long time. As I said earlier, he shares the desert experience, with Moses and with Elijah. Last week I said bible stories were connected, and one of the connectors are mountains and high places. Well another connector is deserts, along with the number 40.

High points and deserts. There are all here as part of this story. Indeed, it finishes on a high mountain. And the angels are back. Remember they don't have wings. But they are here, to help and protect Jesus, as they did Elijah.

This desert experience was crucial in the life of Jesus, for it meant the work of the Kingdom could now begin. But it also says something about who he is. To the identity of 'Son of God', we can now add, 'Son of Man'. For these temptations to have had any real power, Jesus had to be human enough to fail. So here is the identity of God incarnate, human and divine.

What does the experience of Jesus say to us. Because we will fail. That is the difference. We will fail. We will want to lift the stone and eat it as bread. Will want to, and we have, put God to the test, many times, and who has not given into the temptation of power?

But this story is not about failure. At the end, the devil left, and the journey continued.

This story is about the promises of the Word of God holding true. Every time we stumble. God picks us up. I am not suggesting for a moment that God deliberately puts us in situations where we will fail. We do that for ourselves, all the time. I don't believe God acts in such a way. He doesn't need to.

If God was there for Jesus at weakest, remember, he was tempted to give in. God will be there for us, at our lowest moments. Times of despair. When temptations so often get the better of us. When we are too weak to fight back.

We will all have our times in the desert, when the number 40 is so real. We will ask ourselves, over and over again, *When will this ever end?*

Moses and the people of God have been there already. So has Elijah, and here, is Jesus sharing our experience. This is not a story of failure. It is story of hope. No matter how many times we give in to our temptations, the promise is this, God's messengers, his angels, will be there to pick us up, dust us down and give us faith for today and hope for tomorrow. Amen.