



Entering the Wilderness

21st February 2021 Entering the Lenten Wilderness

As we commence the season of Lent, during my preparation of today's message, I noted with interest, the time period of 40 days and its significance in Jewish-Christian scripture. For example,

- In Genesis, the flood which destroyed the earth was brought about by 40 days and nights of rain.
- The Hebrews spent 40 years in the wilderness before reaching the land promised to them by God.
- Moses fasted for 40 days before receiving the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai.
- Our Lord spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry.

As Christians, we regard Jesus' time in the wilderness as the key event for the duration of Lent.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we begin our Lenten journey in 2021, may the words I speak today, challenge us in our daily lives & encourage and help us to grow in wisdom, love and service as your servants in this community. Amen

The Old Testament reading of flood & the saving of Noah, begins a new human era and brings a fresh promise from God, and then our reading from the New Testament, 1 Peter, shows the relationship of Noah, Christian Baptism and Christ's resurrection.

Our Gospel reading from Mark, reminds us that the Passion of our Lord is a struggle against the powers of evil. ¹³**He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.**

In the first reading this morning, we read that after the flood, when God makes his covenant with creation, it is **a covenant with not just Noah & his family, or even with all future human beings, but with “every living creature that is with you”**

God emphasizes this, by detailing all the creatures who are to be involved in this new covenant. Every time the covenant is mentioned, the living creatures are deliberately included

It is as though Noah’s action then binds human & animal destiny together for ever.

We recall, in the first creation story, back in the beginning of Genesis, we note that, **that was always God’s intention.** When God makes human beings in Chapter 1, he does so expressly saying that human beings are responsible for “every creeping that creeps upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26)

According to Genesis, human beings have always been closely bound up with the rest of the created order, so when animals arrive into the ark to preserve them, Noah is exercising the proper stewardship for which people were created.

It is his duty and joy (**and also ours**) to care for what God has made.

This intimate and necessary connection between the human and creation and the rest of what God has made, is part of what Lent is supposed to help us rediscover.

Could it be, that in our modern western civilisation, **much of our lives are built around the assumption, that we can isolate and protect ourselves from the forces and events that beset the rest of the world.**

For example:-

- We build houses to shield ourselves from the elements,

- we generate electricity to keep out the dark and make night and day suit our purposes,
- we develop medicines to keep death at bay,
- we have daily news updates of world events,
- we are bombarded with media that is mostly all about self....
- We think we do need that “wilderness period” to take time out to listen to what God is saying!
- and the list goes on, **and on**

Lent challenges us to remove mental our safety nets.

The practice for most of us, is to do that in very small ways.

For example, we give up

- alcohol, that well earnt drink at the end of a day, or
- chocolate and other treats?? or
- coffee,
- I know personally how hard it is to manage without some of these essential luxuries.

However, do we ever pause to consider that the majority of human beings, of course, manage daily without such cushions of comfort??

Lent should not just be “***40 days of breast beating and self-testing***, and the denial of some of our “***comfy daily treats!***”

Lent should be about us, honestly asking ourselves some basic questions are: “

- “What are we for?”
- “What do we depend on?”
- “Where do we get our self-recognition?”

The Noah story, is a wonderful story about the proper answers to those questions.

All life is utterly dependant on God. If God did not intend to preserve it, it would not be!

If we depart from that basic fact, then we have lost the possibility of finding out our purpose.

All the Synoptic Gospels, all bear witness to a turning point in Jesus's ministry, where our Lord goes into the desert to find out what he was for.

Both Matthew and Luke's Gospel, spell this out quite compellingly. (John, as so often, has a different pattern entirely, and does not mention the wilderness experience).

The desert is an ambiguous place.

It was in the desert that Israel had met God and forged a covenant.

For the Bible, the desert is a place of refuge, but also of difficult trials; a place of encounter with God, but also of diabolic temptations.

The desert may have been the place where the Law was given to Israel, but it was also the place where Israel was tempted, where false Gods were adored, and where Israel murmured against God's chosen one, Moses.

Jesus experiences this ambiguity. He is tempted by Satan, and he is with the wild beasts and the angels look after him.

So, Lent is a time for us to listen closely to the Gospel, to reflect and spend quiet periods in our busy lives & to allow ourselves to turn back to the ways of God our Father.

To restore in our lives that God-given order damaged through our own sinfulness.

Our God reigns! Do we wish to be part of his kingdom?

Lent is a good time to ask ourselves that question.Amen!