

SERMON

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As we have listened to the scripture readings today we can't fail to see the rich images which are printed in our minds through the words that we have heard. Both the reading from Genesis and Gospel according to Mark have water as a feature. The first reading being the flood through which the evil which had filled the land was cleansed and made good. The second being the water which Jesus sanctified through his own baptism, we know that Jesus didn't need to be baptised as he was truly the Son of the living God, but through his immersion in water we've been given the sacrament of Baptism. Both of these events change the future of each and every one of us and today I want us to think about what the time of Lent means to us, and to other Christians. In today's Gospel we hear that Jesus came up out of the water the heavens were torn apart and the spirit descended like a dove on him, and then a voice came from heaven which said "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased".

The Holy Spirit came down and the voice of God the father was heard, and just at that point, at that very moment, we are reminded of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And as soon as this had happened Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days, during which he was tempted by Satan and he was with the wild beasts. In effect he was alone and removed from any of his companions and friends, and he retreated into a wilderness. I don't know about you, but certainly as I've begun my Lenten Journey this year, my mind has also gone back over this Past year to a period of isolation, from the beginning of the Coronavirus Pandemic. For me, because I'm a survivor of Leukaemia, and like so many other people in our country, I was told to remain in my home because I was clinically extremely vulnerable. A very frightening time for a lot of people.

And although this time was spent surrounded by my family and the comforts of our home, I do feel like I have had a year of being in the wilderness, removed from all that I'd been used to, and needing to learn how to do things differently. Even now as we watch recorded television shows, we can see that things have changed and are not the same.

We now see distance between people, screens to avoid contact, and masks that make it feel as though even when you are with someone, they're not fully present. It makes it harder for us to read and to understand people, and maybe we have to work a little bit harder to get the most out of our interactions with one another. At the moment we are all preparing, and we all long for the day when some normality may return to our day, whatever that normality may look like. Our day to day life has changed, and we've all been reminded about how vulnerable we are with our earthly life, and yet this has to be a time that so many of us have relied upon prayer, prayer which is our own and prayer that has been made for us by other people. The wilderness that our society has faced, has been one where we have seen the best in our society, with people reimagining and refocusing on community, caring for others, and doing God's work. Lent is also a period of change, where we can change the way in which we do things. We're given the opportunity to take a good look at our lives and our spiritual lives. To reconsider our relationship with God.

To turn away from our fallen sinful nature, to refocus our lives on him and to dedicate ourselves afresh to God. But this doesn't always come easy, it depends on sacrifice, sacrifice that we have to make. Both of the events which we have considered in our scriptures today are all about new beginnings. The first was through a covenant with God following the flood, and the second was through the life with Jesus, a life that was to become a very public life after his time in the wilderness. And so today on this First Sunday of Lent we have an opportunity for another new beginning, by putting our relationship right with God, and refocusing on him. We can use this time to maybe think about the promises that were made at our own baptisms, or if we're not yet baptised, think seriously about giving our lives to Christ. In some of our Churches, mine included, there's a tradition of not baptising during the season of Lent, and we use this time to prepare our candidates to be baptised on Holy Saturday or Easter Day.

It's a time of preparation that we can all join in, and that should come as no surprise, because whenever we see the number forty in the bible it is usually connected with a period of preparation, from Israel's forty years in the Desert, to the Apostles forty days of preparation between Easter and the Ascension, or even our own period of preparation in the forty days during this Lent. So what will you do this Lent? Have you decided to give up a distraction which comes between you and God, or have you given more focus on your prayer life and dedicated more time to prayer?. Maybe you've decided to give some time to a local project, helping those in your community, or maybe like me you're going to try and use your period of isolation to improve your relationship with God. Whatever you've decided to do, remember that this Lent is ticking away, and that Glorious day of resurrection which we're all preparing for, Easter Day, will be upon us before we know it. And so, just as Jesus used his forty days in the wilderness to prepare himself for that which God called him to do, we too can join in that moment, maybe in our own wilderness for that glorious day of resurrection. We haven't got a second to lose.

Amen