

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 22nd February 2026 (1st Sunday in Lent)

On this Sunday the first in Lent we read the story of the testing of Jesus in the wilderness. This Gospel story tells us that Lent should be more than giving up chocolate, wine, the cigs as we once said or ice cream or other similar types of activity.

At another level St Benedict, who wrote the guidelines for monastic life, said that a monk's life, "ought to be a continuous Lent". Benedict equally recognized that this was not for everyone, and a demanding and tall order, and we know from history that to be the case, yet we know at the same time it is not just about giving up chocolates.

In addition to the Gospel account of Jesus straight after his baptism entering the wilderness is the account from Genesis of Adam and Eve and their dilemma. They are in paradise, all is going great and then this snake enters the scene and offers all sorts of different ideas and their paradise is shattered. Now we have , nakedness, fig leaves, regrets and sour tastes in our mouth.

In contrast Jesus enters the wilderness following his baptism and rejects power, status and wealth.

Lent can be a time, a moment for a life changing reflection and the recreation of one's life. Do you think about Lent in this manner? Do you ask yourself the question as I regularly do, how do we divest ourselves of clutter and business that diminishes us and cause us to worry and fret about the family, community, and the world. As I just said I often find myself trying to "dig myself out of a hole" as we say or struggling through doubt, dry spots, dark moments and wondering can things get worse and is there a future for my children and grandchildren. These feelings I am sure must be prominent in the minds of the people of the Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, and those who are excluded or feel discriminated against here in Australia.

. Today's readings reminds us that the human project began in Genesis and has been put back together or restored in Christ. It is not really history of what happened long ago but rather a reminder of how sin, brokenness, separation from God's divine plan and love happens every day and still happens.

Mark's account of Jesus entering the wilderness is very brief and to the point while Matthew and Luke have much in common while having their own distinct take on the event. All accounts have a conversation element to them or perhaps better described as robust dialogue between Jesus and the devil. In Matthew's account Jesus embraces and relives the experiences of the Israelites wandering in the desert, the wilderness of Sinai for 40 years. This was a time when God probed the hearts of the people to see whether they would be faithful for the long term. Jesus submits to the testing of his calling and rejects the ways of temptation namely, power, wealth and status. He dismisses the three temptations. From his wilderness experience Jesus confirms his faith in God and whose mission he serves.

Rowan Williams former Archbishop of Canterbury has described Australia with a "desert at its heart, a desert that has only begun to explore spirituality." I travel regularly into the desert the so-called barren and wilderness places of our country. Whether they are deserts or forests there is an abundance of life, hours of silence, and at night, the stars of the Milky Way remind me of the divine spirit that hovered over the creation at the beginning of time and the wonder and awe of the mystery of God. This time provides for me a time for reflection. The ancient desert Fathers and Mothers spent many hours in solitude, living alone and in the deserts. Equally the first nation people of this land understand the land, the wilderness as we so often call it, as a place of sustenance, beauty and life giving.

In today's Gospel Jesus is challenged to doubt and dismiss God. I am reminded of this when I hear people say that humanity now has the capacity to decide the future without any reference to a creator God, to make up for what we perceive as

God's failures, forgetfulness, and carelessness. Adam and Eve thought they new better than God, while Jesus commits himself to the will and love of the father. Then Jesus is called to manipulate God to do what we want. Have you ever prayed that God would give you a parking spot, or win the lottery? Some church communities try to manipulate God by offering charismatic healings or showmanship or offering them riches and plenty when they give to a cause, what I call prosperity religion. The devil seeks to tempt Jesus in this way but fails.

Thirdly Jesus rejects the idea of the easy way out. He is not interested in the world for himself but rather for the fulfilling of God's dream for the creation. How often have we tried a short cut method or way to achieve something we want but fail.?

Lent is a time of pilgrimage. A time for us to journey with Jesus and to restore and recreate for ourselves a deeper understanding of God and the call to mission in our contemporary community.

Biblical scholar Henry Wansbrough concludes his commentary on this passage with these words and I quote him,

"Jesus rejects the suggestions of getting into league, we would say getting into bed, with the Tempters powers of persuasion, and values of pride and dominion. Jesus shows himself to be the second Moses, he spends 40 day and nights fasting: like Moses he is taken up on a high Mountain, from where he can see not merely all the territory of the Holy Land, but all the kingdoms of the earth."

I encourage you to find your sacred space, some wilderness time, for yourself this Lent and like Jesus place your trust in God, journey with the whole church this Lent in the way of the cross and to the dawn of the day of resurrection a time of promise, hope and possibilities.

Jesus I have no doubt in his life experiences, in his humanity, would have experienced all the emotions of what it means to be human, the pains, the choices, the disappointments and the highs. The gospels are full of these stories and encounters of Jesus as he engages with serpents, the religious and political leaders of the day, those on the outside, his own inner core of followers and his

God, and so as this season of lent unfolds I invite you to allow yourself the privilege of seeking to enter into the drama of the ministry of Jesus himself as it unfolds, wrestling as he did with the with the principalities of power and darkness as St Paul describes, the ambiguities and challenges of our time as we wait for the fulfilment of God's Kingdom.