

## The Wilderness – reflection day 1

*Reading – Matthew 4 verses 1 – 11*

The reading before us today is the one we used at the beginning of Lent. It is a familiar passage to many of us. Over the years you have probably heard (or preached) many sermons based upon it. And I suspect the majority of those sermons would have been about the temptations of Jesus – indeed, that is the way in which this section is headed in many Bibles.

While we are all familiar with the way in which Jesus uses scripture to overcome the temptations that the devil puts before him, I want to spend the next few days reflecting on the environment in which Jesus found himself – the wilderness. I wonder what thoughts and images come into our minds when we hear the term, “wilderness?” Are they positive, or negative? And why do we feel the way we do?

How would we describe being in the wilderness? May I offer the following attempt? For me, to be in the wilderness is to be in a place where we are facing an uncertain future, where something has had a profound affect upon our lives, where we lack a clear sense of direction, and where everything seems confused. And when we are going through a wilderness experience, some primary cause has led us there.

In Jesus’ case the Spirit led him into the wilderness, but the event that caused his wilderness experience happens just prior to our reading. For we find in Matthew 3 verses 16 & 17, *“And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”* (NRSV).

That incredibly profound event was a turning point in Jesus’ life. As he spent 40 days and nights praying, fasting, reflecting and seeking his heavenly Father, he must have wondered what it all meant – to be publicly declared the Son of God. How would people treat him, look at Him? How would his relationships change? What did it mean to be the Son of God?”

Remember, it was after this lengthy period of praying and fasting in the wilderness that the devil came to tempt Jesus. Yet those 40 days and nights cultivating his relationship with his Father gave Jesus the strength and ability to overcome the wiles of the evil one. Whatever leads you and I into a wilderness experience, and for many today it is the coronavirus, once thing we can all be sure of – in the wilderness we can find the presence of God.

Blessings

Peter