

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we hear the story of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. For me hearing this story reminds me instantly, of where we are in our liturgical calendar. Easter is just around the corner and this is the beginning of Lent. And Lent is all about changing our focus, our rhythm, our colours, our tone and our pace. Some of us like the discipline of giving something up, and/or taking something on for Lent. I always try and let something creative out which aims to speak of the experience of Lent, not only for me, but for our community here too. This years attempt aims to mirror our Lenten Study of lament and hope. There are dead sticks up here, lifeless tree branches, arranged in a pot, sitting in front of a cross, as well as stones, ash and praying hands, backdropped in purple, focusing on a cross and shrouded in the tone of Lent. But what does that mean? The dead sticks represent the wilderness of soul, the lament of our heart. All the could haves, and should haves, wishes. The white cross, reminds us that we are called by God to travel; to the cross through this wilderness. There are obstacles, the blackness, the uneven ground, the climb to get there. But there are aides also. There are also living plants in there, reminding us of hope. The stones and praying hands remind us to pray through it all, and the ash reminds us of the surety of death. From dust we came and to dust we shall return. This is good, we know it to be true. Through our death we attain eternity with God and the journey starts now.

So that's what the story of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, does for me. It evokes this creative process and gets me really thinking and really reflecting, within the bounds of the familiar and well known, but it also causes mild panic. It also means, Easter is only 6 weeks away, it means the gospel of temptation is upon me and I need to find something new or relevant to say about it. It's a passage, maybe one of those pivotal stories of Jesus, where immediately after his baptism he is driven into the unknown, the wilderness, the abyss. So this year, I started where I always start with any reading or scripture; I started with; So What?

Jesus was driven into the wilderness; so what? What does that mean for us here? Jesus was tempted by the devil; so what? What does that say to us in St Peter's?

Jesus was perfect, single minded, and always focused on God's plan; so what? What does that teach us about how we're supposed to survive in the world in 2020?

And as well as my 'so what' questions, I am confronted with honouring my call from God to either teach, prophesy, evangelise or pastor you all through this passage. And, I'm supposed to do this, whilst still remembering that we are not just a Lenten people who lament, but also an Easter people who hope.

And then I am struck by the other 48 weeks in the year; the weeks where we live fully into God's resurrection; not only through experience, but also

through grace and I am reminded to never lose sight of that Easter hope during our Lenten lament. Easter is the most important liturgical season of the year, because we are post resurrection people. We live, exist and have our being in the God who would humble himself, no, limit himself to our human existence, just so we could be saved through his very human death. The thought and magnitude of it still blows my mind. I always feel so humbled and yet so awed by that knowledge. That my God who is huge and awesome and sometimes unattainable, would do this for me, die and suffer, so that I could fully live. And interestingly, this reading about human temptation and Lent remind me of it more pointedly.

And as I reflect, I am reminded of another Lent, another wilderness, another time of lament and seemingly hopelessness.

Some of you know some of my story and some don't. Some of you know the issues and difficulties I had in Bundaberg when I was newly ordained and sent to be a curate with a bully of a Rector and a vindictive oppressive church culture. But even if you don't know, suffice to say, it was extremely unpleasant with the potential to end my career in the church before it even began.

Within just a few weeks of arriving in Bundaberg, it was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. As always, I tried to reflect and think about my journey through the temptations of life, the trials of human existence, my sin; my separation from God. Truth was, that at almost no other time in my life had I

felt so far from God. A few weeks later, during Holy Week, life became unbearable, we left Bundaberg and retreated back to family, friends, and the known. Through that wilderness experience, God never left me, even though at times, I felt he had. I railed against the Father for abandoning me but Jesus on the other hand, was glued to my hip. whilst the father felt farther than ever before, Jesus was closer than ever. He never left me. He gave me the strength to survive. He gave me the nourishment of spirit through this wilderness of lament. He talked me down from the mountain top when I could have thrown myself off. He saved me from the need to exert my power or bow down and worship the wrong god. And my reward that Easter, was the hard cold wood of crucifixion on my bare back. But through it all, I realised that God, the Trinity was there; God the relationship was still there; was still very much my path and my salvation.

Immediately after Bundaberg and even sometimes still, some folk cant comprehend living through something like that. They will say; 'I cant believe you stayed in the church, its a wonder you still have your faith, or how strong are you? Usually I respond with; 'how could I not stay in the church, when this is where God called me. How could I not have faith, when all through my wilderness experience Jesus never left me. Even when I tried to run from him and hide from him, he was stuck to me like glue. How could I lose faith after such a show of faith from my God. And as for strength, I was not strong, in fact, I am still very ashamed of some of my behaviour, some of my responses, some of what I said, or did, in order to survive, but my strength

comes from the one who forgives me, who loves me and journeys with me, not only in the wilderness times or the Easter times, but at every other time, in every other place since and still.

This all feeds nicely into the final reason for our focus on Lent; penitence and repentance. Although these words are a bit churchy, or jargony, they are what this season embodies. Penitence which is *'who we identify and see ourselves to be, as part of the ongoing story of God's people in the world'*. Listen again, *'who we see ourselves as, as part of the ongoing story of God's people within the world.'* Its not about looking drab or morose. Its about remembering that we are God's Easter people and that although we willingly enter into the story of Jesus journey to Jerusalem and the Crucifixion, we are always and forever post resurrection people who remember who we are and whose we are, in relation to the story of God in our lives.

One of the reasons we use the colour purple in our lead up to Easter is because purple is not only the colour of royalty and kingship, which we know Jesus to be, but purple is also extravagant and at least by first century standards, difficult to produce, and expensive to buy. By using such a colour we announce to the world, that we are a people who recognise God's extravagance and richness in our lives. We are a people who understand that our journey with God is sometimes difficult and costly, but no less relevant and worthy.

Which brings me to '*Repentance*'! In the truest sense of the word, repent or repentance is about changing our direction, usually from something bad or evil, to one which is good or righteous. But within the context of the gospel, on the lips of Jesus; repentance, is simply 'turn back or turn yourself around'. Like the song 'the hokey pokey'. Do this, do that, shake it up a bit, but remember to turn yourself around.

Lent is about the last verse, putting your whole self in, shaking it all about and turning yourself around. Look at how you've let the material world encroach on your relationship with God and with others, and turn yourself around. A simple way to remember and understand what repentance is, is to sing the hokey pokey, and remember turn your whole self around for Jesus, with God's help in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was tempted. Jesus was human and Jesus knew stuff before it was going to happen. Jesus willingly entered the space, the journey, the life of humanity and sin, and separated himself from the Father physically through human birth. Jesus limited his divinity in order to fully participate in our humanity. Jesus is our point of contact and connection. But the difference between us is that Jesus never strayed from God. They continued in full relationship through it all. Have you ever wondered if you could possibly do what Jesus did during that time of temptation and exclusion? I believe you could if you fully relied on God and the relationship you've built and fostered throughout the years.

So, this Lent, perhaps, do something different, or new, or ancient, something, anything to remind you of where you are, who you are, and to whom you belong. Remember that through it all, you are now and always, forever Easter people and remember to live into that hope; that relationship in God and the life of hope as well as lament that you are called to, and then turn yourself around and do it all over again.

The Lord be with you

And also with you.