

Sunday 18th February 2024; 1st Sunday of Lent

Benefice Holy Communion Oswaldkirk

The opening words of today's Gospel reading, "Then Jesus was lead up by the Spirit in to the wilderness to be tempted." Just before he had experienced the affirmation of His Father saying, "This is my son, listen to Him." So, this new task is not something random, he was lead and so for forty days and nights Jesus remains in the wilderness without food or water, where he is tempted.

Throughout Scripture, we see extensive use of metaphor and the 'wilderness' is both a real place but also with a spiritual meaning. It is a place of peril and danger, is harsh, wild, and uncontrollable, sometimes barely habitable where a person is vulnerable and possible in great danger. But it is also a place that can be breathtakingly beautiful and even transformational. It may represent a place of depression and despair but can also be a place of revelation and blessing, none more so than for the Israelites who had too spent forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, suffering terribly, and loosing faith and trust, then Moses meets God again on Mount Sinai and is given the tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments.

In its truest spiritual sense, the season of Lent is a 'wilderness experience' a time for self-examination and reflection, taking stock of where we have come to on our journey with God. It is a time to test ourselves and be prepared to experience things which will increase our spiritual maturity and be open to the transforming work of God's Spirit.

This 'wilderness' experience can also be for us rugged, and harsh, lonely, and uncertain. As Ash Wednesday was the day to acknowledge our brokenness, vulnerability, and

ultimate death, Lent is the time we learn, are trained and re-focus on our place in God's Kingdom and His mission for us.

It is a place of loneliness and solitary isolation, but also tenacity and resilience, preparation, and power. The wilderness offers a time to be confronted by the disparity between who we are and who God call us to be, how we live and how God is calling us to live.

For us the wilderness time is when we can feel we are tested and experience hunger, thirst and longing as Jesus did. It might be painful, but the wilderness also yields spiritual growth and a time about learning more about ourselves and God, and where life is heading. God will reveal Himself and when He does, He will show us reality and the never-ending implications of being His children.

We will learn again to gain strength and resilience, to walk by faith and not by sight, to wait on God and discover our deepest selves. The Lent wilderness is a path to self-discovery.

So welcome Lent, have courage to enter your wilderness and even when God seems distant and silent have faith because beyond and through that sense will be the greater and deeper Love where God will refine us and remind us of who we are.

So, on that, you are invited to join me for the Lent course beginning tomorrow when we can together enter the wilderness of Lent and see what we can learn about ourselves and Him who love us.

Thanks be to God.