



THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

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February 21, 2021
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



In the 3rd chapter of the book of Genesis the first sin is recorded and also the subsequent judgement by GOD. As the human capacity for sin is not reduced in any way, GOD determines to wipe out humanity from His creation ^ (Genesis 6:5-7). Noah, however, has GOD's approval and is instructed to build an ark to survive the ensuing flood. GOD intends to begin again with Noah – to make a new ^ covenant with him as we are told in today's reading. This covenant embraces the whole of creation which has survived the flood. His covenant promise is to never again destroy the earth by flood ^ (9:11). Covenants always have signs and in this case, it is the sign of the rainbow. GOD commits Himself to this sign. It is not to be simply a reminder for Noah and his family

– for when GOD sees the rainbow, He too will be reminded of the promise.

Our passage from Peter's first letter has often been described as one of the most obscure and difficult passages in the New Testament and many interpretations have been proposed. However, the main point must be why Peter sets off on this exposition at this point in his letter. It comes in the middle of a passage about Christian attitudes to persecution. ^The outcome of CHRIST's death in verse 18 was that He atoned for sin. When He was raised, He went to preach to rebellious fallen spirits from the time of Noah before GOD judged the world with the flood. At that time – as now – a small minority remained faithful while the rest persecuted them. Noah and his family were saved by water. Baptism – as a symbol of GOD's grace – ^saves us now – and acts as a sign of GOD's promise of ultimate salvation, however harsh the persecution might be. The risen CHRIST, who now sits at the right hand of GOD, is

ample reassurance – better even than a rainbow in the sky.



What is the toughest challenge that you have had to endure? How did you become stronger because of it? In some native American cultures, boys have traditionally experienced what’s called “a vision quest” before being recognised as adults within their community. The vision quest involves a time of fasting and living alone in the desert or wilderness until the quester has a spiritual vision that he then takes back to the shaman or medicine man in the village to interpret. In a sense, this is what happened to JESUS as He prepared to begin his ministry. After 40 days of fasting and prayer in the desert, JESUS confronted temptations to abandon or deny His mission. [The other gospels of Matthew and Luke go into greater detail as to what these temptations were.] JESUS emerges with a much clearer idea of and a deeper commitment to His mission.

Which begs the question – “Why did JESUS fast and pray for 40 days?”

In the Bible, the number 40 is used to represent a time of preparation and cleansing. It takes 40 days for GOD to cleanse the earth of evil in the story of Noah’s ark. The Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years before they are ready to truly embrace their identity as GOD’s chosen people. JESUS fasts and prays for 40 days in the desert so that He might be fully prepared for His ministry and for doing the will of His Father.

Why, then, during those 40 days, was JESUS tempted by the devil? Isn’t JESUS GOD?

Yes, JESUS is fully divine. He is also fully human. Church teaching declares that JESUS was “like us in all things except sin.” Temptation, however, doesn’t become sin until we give into it. The Gospel makes it clear that JESUS never did. When we struggle to do what is right in the face of powerful temptation to do wrong, we can take comfort in knowing that JESUS knows exactly what the experience is like. This Lenten

season is a time for us to turn away from sin and resist temptations – to recognise that we CAN change our lives and decide NOT to make bad choices.

What is JESUS' mission and how does it apply to me?

JESUS comes out of the desert calling for people to repent because the Kingdom of GOD is near. JESUS is telling people that, through Him, GOD the Father is about to transform the universe. The Kingdom of GOD is all of creation after it has been cleansed by GOD of evil and sin. All those who want to be a part of this joyous new world must allow the Spirit that led JESUS into the desert to enter into their hearts. The challenges will be difficult to be sure; but just think how much stronger we will be spiritually on Easter morning and how much more joyful we will be in celebrating that our LORD has risen.



The English artist, Stanley Spencer, who died in 1959, painted a wilderness series about the life of JESUS. In one of those paintings, he depicts JESUS sitting on the desert sands with a “wild beast”. But the beast was not

a roaring lion or a skulking tiger. In His cupped hands JESUS is depicted holding a small but deadly scorpion. JESUS is both HUMAN and GOD. Spencer may be suggesting that the really dangerous beasts are those small ones that can slither insidiously into our lives – the persistent sins and small infidelities that, almost unnoticed, can inject a paralysing venom into our discipleship.

JESUS comes out from His wilderness experience strengthened for praise and pain and mission. The arrest of John the Baptist is the first storm that breaks over Mark's Gospel – but – over it rises a Galilean rainbow of hope as JESUS proclaims His first words: "This is the time of fulfilment. The Kingdom of GOD is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." On Ash Wednesday, the last words of that proclamation were an alternative that was pronounced as we were signed as baptised disciples of the tempted One and called to Lenten mindfulness of the struggle between sin and grace, success and failure – into which we are tossed.

The desert sand is not under our feet but in our hearts. Its grit is the daily irritations and indefinable loneliness we often feel. We need this period of Lent to heighten our awareness of the importance of uncluttered spiritual and physical space where we can come to grips with our pain, where we can discover the beauty of GOD and our sisters and brothers under the surface sands of our busy lives – and – where we can allow our ears to be “dug-out”¹ by closer listening to the Word of GOD at our services or in Bible Studies. We may then become wiser about our spiritual baggage that we, as wilderness travellers, need to keep or discard in our trek towards Easter.

So, let's think about what we can work on for the next 40 days.

What might we do without?

What can we give more of – in terms of our time or money?

¹ Psalm 40:6

How much more often can we pray or study the Bible?



May we pray:

GOD our Father, Your Son began His ministry despite the arrest of John the Baptist. Quieten our minds and our hearts so that we, too, might hear Your call and bravely go forth to do your will. This we pray through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.

All-Age Lectionary Services – Scripture Union – 2011 – Milton Keynes, England

NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible – D.A. Carson General Editor – Zondervan 2018

Celebrating the Lectionary – Year B – Garratt Publishing

Living Liturgy 2021 – Liturgical Press Minnesota

Daily Prayer 2021 – Liturgy Training Publications