

St Hilda's Sermon – Sunday 5th March 2017

The Voyage Begins.

It is the first Sunday in Lent. Hot Cross buns and Easter eggs have been in the shops for weeks and the year is well under way. Summer has finally arrived and we're feeling a bit guilty about complaining about the heat after our long wait. On Wednesday we joined with the congregation of St Joseph's to commemorate Ash Wednesday, we've decided what we are giving up, if anything, for Lent. The world likes the idea of buns and chocolate eggs but as for the rest? – Well- not so keen.

So what is it all about? Our Gospel reading for today has Jesus going into the wilderness. He has been baptised, the Spirit of God descended like a dove and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Surely the obvious step is to get on with the job. But he doesn't. He goes for forty days into the wilderness, on his own.

My bible calls it the temptation of Jesus but the word translated temptation is better translated testing. Temptation carries the idea of wrongdoing whereas testing is more neutral.

The first test is in the form of physical comfort – the small stones that surround him look like small loaves of bread. Jesus has the gifts to make them into loaves of bread. The next is about the spectacular and the third is the lure of power. Throughout the argument is carried out by knowledge of the scriptures: both Jesus and the one testing him, Satan, the enemy, use it.

Jesus is on retreat. He is taking time out, away from the business of life to be on his own with God. He has been commissioned for a task. The question is how to do it. The testing provides some ways he could carry it out and avoid perhaps the final test. Jesus could do miracles, take the easy way, he has the gifts, but the final result of taking the easy way would be the inability to overcome the final test – crucifixion and failure to overcome death in the resurrection.

Last weekend, I and Glenis were on retreat. We prepared by reading the book by C. S. Lewis 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader'. It is in the Narnia series and tells the story of Lucy, Edmund and their cousin Eustace who are swept into a picture and have an adventure with King Caspian, Reepicheep and the crew of the ship, the Dawn Treader. They face challenges and change and grow as they deal in their different ways with these challenges.

As we travelled through the story with the characters we were challenged to consider the parts of ourselves that maybe needed to change. Faithful Lucy who was dogged by her insecurity, Edmund who had previously betrayed his family and knew only too well that the way back was what Aslan did for him in sacrificing himself and the new character Eustace who was self-centred and blamed everyone else for his misfortunes. He believed that he

was special and deserved special attention and care. He also didn't believe in anything fictional which was a problem for him from the start.

Eustace eventually leaves the group and finds a dragon hoard which, in his greed, he envisions as providing him with a comfortable life even if he can't get out of Narnia. Unfortunately for him that resulted in him becoming a dragon. He soon realises something of how he has been behaving and repents and returns to the crew of the Dawn Treader but they can't undragon him. It is when he meets Aslan and submits to him that he becomes a boy again.

Caspian, who in the previous book was a Prince whose father had been killed by his uncle so that his uncle could take the throne, is now King of Narnia and is on a quest to find the seven lords who sailed to the east.

Reepicheep, the talking mouse, is on his own quest to travel to the east where Aslan, the great lion (and Christ figure) comes from.

They travel as far as they can on the Dawn Treader to the east and Reepicheep leaves them to journey on in his own little coracle as he continues his quest.

As we considered the different parts of the story and what they might say to each of us we also read a version of Psalm 18, in sections. The sections were read twice and we listened for a word or phrase that spoke to us.

In the times between the sessions we could walk on the beach, decorate our log books, pray, listen, think about what God was saying to each of us.

Lent is the season for this. The traditional disciplines of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We may decide to give up chocolate, computer games or whatever, but the importance is in what we do with the time or money we save. How do we use that? There are Lenten appeal envelopes in the foyer. The cost of that coffee or the chocolate could be put into those and so used to further God's work in the world.

Maybe each day take a short passage of scripture and read it through a few times asking God to show you a word or phrase and then spend time listening, with the ear of your heart (as it says in the Rule of Benedict), to what He is saying to you. It is a time honoured method called *lectio divina*, sacred reading, chewing over the Word of God, less concerned with what it means than with what it is saying to you now.

Another time-honoured discipline is to take a book and read it during Lent. We have a library in the Common Room. You could choose a book and read it slowly through, stopping and thinking about what God might be saying to you. There is no rush. Or, of course, some of us will take part in the Lenten studies, meeting each week to read and discuss together.

Taking time out for listening to God can result in us hearing him guiding us into different ministries, setting aside some others or the reordering of the time and effort we put into our ministries. This may mean moving on to another place.

For Christina, like Reepicheep, her journey continues onto a different place, although, unlike Reepicheep, she will return on occasions. Like the crew of the Dawn Treader, we wish her well as we continue on our journey here.

It may not all be smooth sailing but to quote N. T. Wright: “But, as God’s children, we are entitled to use the same defence as the Son of God himself. Store scripture in your heart, and know how to use it. Keep your eyes on God, and trust him for everything. Remember your calling, to bring God’s light into the world. And say a firm ‘no’ to the voices that lure you back into the darkness.

Judy Youmans