

Sermon Notes: **Lent One**

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalm 91:1-2,9-16
Romans 10:8b-13, Luke 4:1-13

- This story is told because whether it happened or not it had to be told. It is an archetypal story involving the testing of leaders – who must have struggled and been tested and won through in order to be leaders. Stories like this are necessary in the same way as birth stories which prefigure events of significance.
- There are many layers to the story. The wilderness setting is common for leader figures and stories of liberation (John the Baptist, Exile and return, community of Essenes).
- “Wilderness” is the wild place, a place of purification and preparation, a place to grapple with God.
- “Wilderness” is probably the Judean desert. Consider that ‘wilderness’ has many forms – desert, jungle, urban conditions, where others work and live.
- As with the Birth narratives there are two versions Mark’s [1:12ff] and the ‘Q’ version used by Matthew and Luke. The former has Jesus tested for 40 days and nights, the latter after 40 days of fasting. Both versions provide hints of a connection to Israel’s story. The offer of bread recalls ‘manna’, the offer of power recalls Moses’ view of the promised land, and the temple story recalls the miracles of Israel’s wilderness days. Jesus’ responses are drawn from the Deuteronomist and the Psalmist.
- Forty days mirror the forty days that Moses was tested after the covenant was renewed [Ex 34:28]; Elijah too spent forty days on Mt Sinai [1Kings 19:8];
- This story is bigger than simply ‘what happened’. It is a theological story about Jesus, about the devil and about us. It is larger than life because it encourages us to address choices we need to make as we face God’s hope for the world and God’s call to each of us. The story starts to define who Jesus was and who/what he was not. The central question of the story is: who am? who is he? And finally, who are we?
- Jesus overcame temptation with knowledge of his identity, the knowledge of God’s purpose for him [mankind] and the knowledge of God’s will.
- The Deuteronomy reading is about sacrifice and offering – shaped by the past. The Luke reading is about temptation, survival, God’s call and our response.
and some questions...
- Jesus temptations are specific and meaningful to his time and place. How might these temptations manifest themselves in the 21st century?
- Jesus’ responses to each of the temptations are quite specific. How are these appropriate today?
- Having ‘failed’, the devil retreats, but only until ‘an opportune time’. What might this mean for us?

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Two**

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18,

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Gospel: Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)

- **Transfiguration gospel** – this gospel is about transformation, about the divinity of Christ, the sonship of Jesus, but it is also about listening – listening to God, listening to what Christ tells us in the gospels, and listening to each other.
- The importance of holy places, mountains or other landforms, in our spiritual lives – these places can be anywhere in the world. Sometimes in other cultures they have associations with pre- and non-Christian “spirit worlds”, or with events that are significant to other faiths. It can be enlightening to visit such places in a spirit of awe and holiness, to listen to what the place itself says to us. A church may be such a place, or a little hill in a paddock. In our own country it may involve showing respect to an Indigenous sacred site by staying away from it.
- **Luke 13 gospel** – this gospel reading is very short, almost a diversion among stories of Jesus’ healing miracles and great parables. There is a strength about Jesus’ response, a directness that we don’t often see. He calls Herod a “fox” and likens himself to a hen. What normally happens between a fox and a hen? We have all heard the stories of Aesop’s or de la Fontaine’s fables (if you haven’t then you might like to google them). The hen is vulnerable, as are her chicks. The fox is cunning and will usually outwit the hen. But sometimes, the fox gets tangled in his own cunning and the hen manages to escape with her chicks intact. Is that what happens here?
- To what extent do we play the role of the Pharisees who merely tell Jesus that Herod wants to kill him? Are they being helpful? What would Jesus prefer that they do here? Is Jesus grateful for their advice?
- The Epistle reading is helpful for emphasizing the longing love that Jesus expresses in his hen and chickens analogy above – Paul writes in Philippians 4:1 “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved” – the same sense of loving and longing is present in Paul as is present in Jesus in this Gospel reading. Herod could also be seen to be emblematic for what Paul is referring to when he says, “For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears” (3:18). It is almost as if the Epistle is an explanation or elaboration of what Jesus is saying in Luke.

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Three**

Isaiah 55: 1-9

Psalm 68: 1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

- The Gospel reading is in two parts and comes towards the end of Jesus' teaching both the disciples and the continuing gathering crowd. Firstly he listens and responds to the crowd and their linking calamities with God's judgment. Secondly he responds with 'the parable of the barren fig tree'.
- The sequences of teaching, parable and healing is important in Luke, because it explores the Lukan theme of journey through a developing relationship and understanding of Jesus divinity and the integrity of relationship we are called to in ministry with Jesus and the world. There is practical experience following his encounters and building relationship in the places he engages. A continual renewal and sending out.
- This gospel counteracts the fear people have and the propensity of the church to name suffering as the result of the sin of people who suffer.
- The parable of the unproductive fig tree is about being given another chance in relationship with others.
- In repentance we 'Choose' to have another chance, and we recognize we need to give others the opportunity to have another chance too.
- People need their own time and own space to grow. Under the fig tree, the gardener tries to do something else to encourage the tree to fruit. To dig and to fertilise. With others we have an opportunity to explore different ways of growing, seeing, listening, being transformed.
- Jesus reminds us in this Gospel that we are called continually to recognise peoples potential. We are also reminded that we need to fix our own wounds/misunderstandings before we try to fix others perceived wounds.
- Isaiah invites us to come to the water: an invitation to the abundance of life. In the light of the gospel that our focus be on God, to listen and to thirst, and that, that which God gives us is free and unconditional (at no earthly cost). The choice of life. A greater choice which restores us to the fullness of life.

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Four**

Joshua 5:9-12,

Psalm 32,

2 Corinthians 10: 1-13

Gospel: Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32. (No parallels)

- JOSHUA 5. At Gilgal the Israelites, like the prodigal, exchanged food of the wilderness for the food of their new home. They had crossed the Jordan onto the new land of God's promise.
- All the signs of the covenant rush together: Jordan, circumcision, Passover, the land's produce 'disgrace of Egypt' is of uncertain meaning; the Egyptians would themselves have been circumcised. They might well have despised escaped dirty slaves; but
- all that is passed away (as Paul asserts); this is the new start: the first passover in the land. Manna is no longer necessary as they can live off the land.
- PSALM 32. A Davidic psalm, for healing. Healing is seen as forgiveness in response to sickness which was seen as punishment for sin.
- Healing comes after acknowledgement of sin (v. 5)
- V.6 the psalmist recommends that all have similar faith in God and do God's will.
- 2 CORINTHIANS 10. Paul's appeal for true apostleship.
- He is quoting his opponents and setting up a paradox between his gentleness and meekness with boldness in Christ as well as comparing weakness and power in Christ.
- LUKE. This set of three parables is found only in Luke. It is the third of a series about the lost.
- Which voice to choose – Father or older or younger son? Could re-tell according to one or other. The Venerable Peta Sherlock tells it in the voice of the older brother most cleverly. *Inside the Sunday Gospels New Commentaries for the Year of Luke*, Year C. E. J Dwyer 1994 Australia pp.51-2
- Symbols of sonship are significant: robe for festal eating, not for working in the fields, the ring for authority and the sandals for prestige as slaves did not wear sandals. In contrast the pigs were the culminating indignity for a Jew to work amongst.
- Gentle reproof by the Father to the older son as he calls the younger 'your brother' not 'my son'.
- A fatted calf for a feast of welcome or a goat for the older son's friends indicate degrees of limiting generosity.
- In the lost sheep, God finds the sheep, in the lost coin, the woman sweeps diligently but in this one it is up to the son to wake up and decide to go home.
- Returning to be a slave is seriously to underestimate the unconditional love of God.

Sermon Notes: **Lent Five**

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Psalm 119:9-16

Hebrews 5:5-14

Gospel: John 12: 20-33

“We wish to see Jesus”. What is our response to this seemingly simple request as we, Jesus’ followers, stand in the footsteps of the first disciples?

Andrew went first to Philip. Maybe he was unsure if these Greeks were the sort of people who Jesus cared about? Maybe he was just aware of how tired Jesus must have been?

Jesus interprets the coming events of his death, resurrection and ascension as being for the purpose of drawing all people to himself (John 12.32). Here we think back to God’s ‘new covenant’ of Jeremiah 31. A covenant inscribed in the hearts of God’s people, allowing all to know God – from the least to the greatest.

Jesus has removed the gatekeepers and the barriers separating people from God. But people continue to request “we wish to see Jesus”. In one way, answering this request is simple. All of us who have met Jesus have our own story and example to help others to meet with Jesus.

This is the application of God’s mission among ABM’s partners in the Northern Philippines (refer to the From Cows to Comfort Rooms DVD). Those who give their time and talents to minister in the Fairview community do so because they have seen Jesus. By living out the transformation of God’s love in their own lives they are enabling other people to see Jesus.

Something to ponder: What do we expect to find when we come to see Jesus? Were the Greeks seeking a wise philosopher; a teacher; perhaps a confident general on the eve of a battle that he would surely win? Instead, Jesus looks towards Golgotha and says “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. How open are we to being surprised and confronted when we seek Jesus?

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Six**

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118: 1- 2, 19-29

Gospel: Luke 19: 28-40

- Psalm 118: The psalmist gives us the precursor to the great crowd who comes to worship God. Verse 27 speaks of the festal procession complete with branches; and Vs 28 and 29 extol God and call on the reader to give thanks that the Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever.
- Jesus turns his face towards Jerusalem humbly and obediently even though he knows what will happen when he gets there.
- We understand the donkey to be an animal that represents peace. Does Jesus ride the donkey so that the authorities see he comes in peace? – a bit like holding out the olive branch. Or does it represent the opportunity to greet the king of peace who comes triumphantly into Jerusalem, but not in the form that the city would be used to?
- It is interesting that Luke does not take us from the triumphant entry in chapter 19 straight to the passion narrative in chapter 22 and 23. So his ministry has not ended yet. In the space in between, the anticipation of what is to happen to Jesus builds. In the meantime he continues to teach; he weeps over Jerusalem, cleanses the temple, answers his critics and foretells the fall of the temple.
- The 1970's musical Jesus Christ superstar records this event in these words:

(The crowd sings)

"Hosanna, Heysanna, Sanna, Sanna ho,
Sanna ho sanna hey sanna,
Hey JC, JC won't you smile at me
Sanna ho sanna hey superstar.

(The Pharisees sing)

"Tell that rabble to be quiet,
We anticipate a riot,
This common crowd is much too loud
Tell the mob and tell the throng,
That they are fools and they are wrong
They are a curse, they should disperse.
Hosanna, Heysanna, Sanna, Sanna ho...

(Jesus sings)

"Why waste your breath moaning at the crowd,
Nothing can be done to stop the shouting,
If every tongue was still the noise would still continue,
The rocks and stones themselves
Would start to sing."
Hosanna, Heysanna, Sanna, Sanna ho...

The sea of voices welcoming Jesus on the path down from the Mount of Olives does not make him a friend of the officials – the Pharisees request to Jesus to make the disciples stop is not simply about crowd control, but is a whole lot about how threatened they feel by this following and what Jesus is teaching. Is he a superstar? Should we relate to him like we do the superstars of today?

- What does this story have to say to us today? What if Jesus hadn't decided to go into Jerusalem?
- Themes for this passage include: humility, obedience, unity between heaven and earth, hope love, joy, choice, empowerment.

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