

The Way x11. Sunday 17 March_2019.

Jesus makes a Way in the wilderness.

READ: Luke 4: 1- 15 and Hebrews 4: 15, 16.

This year through our Sunday study and reflection on Scripture we aim to see a clear thread of teaching and revelation about God showing **a way forward and a way through** that we can **follow** – whether we are journeying in an easy friendly place or the hostile wilderness.

There are prophecies in the **OT** about ***GOD making a way in the wilderness (Isaiah 43: 19-21)*** for his people. In the early Church “*the Way*” became a title describing the followers of Jesus - before the term Christian was used. We read of men and women who “*belonged to the Way*” (*Acts 9:2; 22:4*) because presumably of Jesus’ own claim in John 14 and in response to questions that he is the Way to the Father God – he is the way through the wilderness.

In the wilderness there are no pre-marked, tarmacked roads. The way through the wilderness is not obvious and must be discovered by journeying and perhaps listening to others and watching out for key marker stones that tell and show how others have crossed over and journeyed through. In a spiritual sense the way forward needs to be discovered by revelation every step of the way. The terrain in the wilderness is often hostile and by definition it is often a place of solitude. The wilderness is also in Scripture seen as a place where God can be encountered and heard, and people empowered.

We seek the Way of Jesus – to see how he lived his life and won his battles. LENT journey towards the suffering of Easter has begun and last Sunday we began in our talks to follow Jesus on the Way of obedience and testing.

Prepare now for the “evil day” – Ephesians 6: v13 – (mentioned last week) whenever that day may be. When your faith and trust is really tested! This was not the only occasion when Jesus was tried/ tested. *In Luke 4: 13 we are told that the devil after tempting in in every way left him until a more opportune time...we are more vulnerable to temptation at certain times.*

Gospel Records Of The Temptation Compared

Matthew 4:1-11	Mark 1:12-13	Luke 4:1-13
Led by the Holy Spirit	Spirit Impelled Him	Led around by the Spirit
In the wilderness	In the wilderness	In the wilderness
Was there 40 days	Was there 40 days	Was there 40 days
Fasted		Ate nothing
Became hungry		Became hungry
Tempted by Satan	Tempted by Satan	Tempted by the devil
Areas of temptation described	Areas of temptation not described	Areas of temptation described
	Wild beasts were present	
		Devil left Christ until an "opportune time"
Angels ministered to Him	Angels ministered to Him	

Did Christ Drink Water? None of the gospels say anything about Jesus drinking water or sleeping, but they do report that Christ fasted or did not eat anything for 40 days and nights. There are no comments about Christ drinking water but he must have otherwise he would not have faced the experience as fully human (but drawn on Divine strength too). Medical experts state that the typical man or woman cannot live more than ten days without water, however, some individuals have lived 21 days without water. We can live much longer without food.

The relationship to focus on in the wilderness temptations is that of the Trinity.

Luke 4: 1 tells us that Jesus returned from the Jordon – where of course he had been baptised by John. (Read **Mark 3:16,17** at beginning service).

Jesus – Father’s voice – Spirit (Jordon Baptism - dance)

Jesus “full of the Holy Spirit” is lead by the Spirit into the desert (wilderness or lonely place – no other human was there). The only other beings that were there were the wild animals (Mark’s Gospel) and then the angels. **The purpose?** The Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness – **to be tempted by the devil**. (FOCUS on Trinity – the devil is peripheral to this essential relationship).

E have already said that according to the teaching of *Philippians 2* we need to have the same attitude as Jesus – v8 “**he was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death – his death on the cross**”. (see also *Hebrews 5: 7 -9*)

Jesus came to fight and win the greatest spiritual battle of all time but he did not use the weapons of this world to defeat evil (the world the flesh and the devil) 2 *Corinthians 10: 4* but in his life his righteousness was tested and in his suffering passion and on the Cross and in the tomb he used his mighty power.

Jesus was not alone in the wilderness because of that Trinitarian relationship of Godhead – the Oneness of the Father, son and Spirit relationship was challenged but not broken or divided. He surely missed human companionship, but he was not alone. (The Greek word for devil **diabolos** – means to divide – and that was what the evil one was seeking to do – to divide).

Jesus was physically weak but inwardly strong after this time of trial. At the end of 40 days we are **not told that Jesus was lonely – no we are told that Jesus was hungry! His relationship – his Oneness with the Father and the Spirit is intact.**

This relationship is essential and crucial – this is what is being attacked by the one labelled the “devil” – or the divider! All that is given in description of this “being” – is what the devil SAID – his words. We are not told that the devil/divider had any substance or form.

In Genesis Satan is pictured as a serpent and in Isaiah (14: 12) as an angel of light (Lucifer – Latin name for the planet Venus (NB C.S. Lewis classic portrayal of evil in “Voyage to Venus”, in classic mythology – the light bringer. Jesus refers to this perhaps in *Luke 10: 18* – *some sort of fallen cosmic being – star or angel*). **BUT here the temptation comes as words/ thoughts –**

It’s therefore logical to me to assume that the “appearance of Satan/ the devil or divider” has no relevance. – It is what the words/ the voice/ the thoughts suggests/ asks/ and demands that is the temptation. (So too when we are tempted – there is no appearance of substance just the temptation to our mind, our body – our soul). All images or pictures of the devil are less than helpful.

The temptation/ temptor seeks to separate and divide Jesus from his Oneness of relationship and purpose with the Father and Spirit. The devil seeks to short circuit Jesus’ following through on the will/ the purpose of the Godhead – the Trinity. **The tempter seeks to divide the Absolute Oneness.**

If you are God’s Son (if you are in relationship with the Father) order these stones to become bread.

Obviously, there is a connection here with God’s provision of bread/ manna in the wilderness to the moaning and disobedient Hebrews. The Messiah was also expected to provide manna. Hence Jesus’ later declaration that he is the Bread of Life.

Jesus is increasingly hungry because of his fast so the devil says – satisfy your desperate human fleshly hunger with physical bread. And by implication give

precedence to physical, material satisfaction. Don't stay with what the Godhead has planned and agreed, obey the craving that you have and accept physical satisfaction.

NO, says Jesus. Humans need the Word of God – relationship with God to be fully satisfied. Yes, humans need bread but not only physical food – humans need “every word that comes out of God’s mouth”. (This has been written in the Scriptures – *Deuteronomy 8: 3*) Jesus did deny himself bread when he was fasting...because of love for the Father and the Spirit he refused to satisfy an individual craving.

Hebrews passage – Jesus experienced the temptations that we too will face (and he did not disobey. Without a doubt we too are tempted at various points to seek physical satisfaction over relationship with God. The divider seeks to disrupt our relationship with God. Any attempt – successful or not to divide us from relationship with God and God’s people – is an attempt to steal our true satisfaction.

GREED in Scripture – see *1 Corinthians 6:10* does not just relate to greed for food, but also greed for sex, and greed for love of money and so on. (One of the words brought to us was – Jesus first. *Seeking the rule of the Kingdom – Jesus First* – and all the physical things we need will be provided).

Jesus made a Way in the wilderness by staying in relationship, in Oneness with God the Father and God the Spirit. He refused to doubt his relationship with the Godhead and the WORD that the Father had spoken – *“You are my own dear son, I am pleased with you”.*

We discover the Way through the “wilderness” by hearing and believing what God has spoken to us. That’s where it starts. We will think about the other 2 temptations the divider brought to Jesus in the weeks ahead. We need to learn from Jesus if we too are to travel through the wilderness and enter into God’s “Promised Land”.

Let’s remember that if we are listening to the Spirit and he takes us into the wilderness – then that is so that we may encounter God more deeply and become more dependent on that relationship. (Prayer alone is what Ruth Burrows calls “desert time” and in that sense the Spirit often calls me/you into the wilderness – the alone place so that we may be with God in intimacy).

Blessing prayer: May we walk in the Way of Jesus according to the truth he has revealed. May we choose the life that he offers on the way of obedience. We pray for strength for the journey and right relationship with all we meet this week on the road.

We ask for grace to make the choices with humility. We ask that we may always engage with the world in mission and not walk by on the other side.

We pray that we may know the Word of God and live by it.

We are within the love of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.