

The Way x13. Sunday 31 March_2019.

Jesus makes a Way in the wilderness.

READ: Luke 4: 1- 13 and Psalm 91.

JESUS declared himself to be the Way (to the Father *John 14: 6*). *Acts 9: 2* His followers are described as those who ***belonged to the Way.***

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 we have in our talks been following follow Jesus on the Way of obedience. I have already said that **if we want to find the Way through** then according to the teaching of scripture we need to have the same attitude as Jesus – *Philippians 2 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)

Last week I encouraged us that the relationship to focus on in the wilderness temptations is that of the Trinity. *Luke 4: 1* tells us that Jesus returned from the Jordan – where of course he had been baptised by John.

Jesus – Father’s voice – Spirit (Jordan Baptism – dance of Trinity – description of how we experience Godhead – 3 in one. *Tertullian* early third century CE)

Jesus “full of the Holy Spirit” is led 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 **but the Greek word diabolos means DIVIDER and that is what evil seeks to do in this case the essential Oneness of Godhead).**

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. Jesus surely missed human companionship, but he was not alone.

Jesus was physically weak but inwardly strong after this time of trial. At the end of 40 days and nights fasting from food 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.**

What does the “divider” look like? 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.

It’s therefore logical to me to assume that what the devil or divider “looks like” is no earthly 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. **Because here the temptation comes as words/ thoughts –**

The temptation/ Tempter (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.**

This week we consider vv 9 – 13; here the Divider takes Jesus to Jerusalem and sets him on the highest point in the Temple. (Either the top of Solomon's Portico where it intersects with the Royal Porch OR the point/ gable closest to the 450-foot drop into the Kedron Valley).

The devil takes him in his imagination to **Jerusalem** the centre of Jewish worship, power and identity. Jerusalem is the place where Jesus confronts and is confronted by the powers.

“The devil invites Jesus to test out his Sonship by putting God to the test”, Simon Jones.

- a) The devil wants Jesus to doubt his relationship with the Trinity and so
- b) To doubt the Father's love by “testing God the Father* who said at his Baptism – *you are my beloved son with whom I am pleased.* So the devil says: -

If you are God's Son (if you are in relationship with the Father) ...Read v9

A rabbinic tradition prophesied that the Messiah would reveal himself on the top of the roof of the Temple... but it said nothing about him leaping off the roof! (*Pes.R36 (162a) in SBI, 151*). Because of this and also because the account doesn't mention any person/ crowd watching we can probably rule out this therefore as a temptation to perform a sensational miracle so that others would believe Jesus was the Messiah. We can probably also rule out that the temptation was to in a moment of madness commit suicide because the better explanation is that the temptation was to test God's love and not to trust that God would keep his promises. Test God and see if God intervenes and saves you from the forces of gravity Jesus.

Test God - by in affect asking God for sign. Jesus was asked for a “sign” on occasion and refused to give one. *No sign will be given you except the sign of Jonah* said Jesus. Jonah was 3 days in the belly of the great fish and Messiah will be 3 days in the grave before being raised body to life. We too should consider not putting God to the test by asking for signs! We believe because Jesus died and rose again and we know him. We need no other sign. (Because of our weakness or immaturity God may have in his mercy given us signs but as we grow to know God more deeply we have no need to ask for signs to confirm God's love or whatever. Learn to know the voice of the Shepherd and trust. (OT way of thinking – asking for signs.)

In this temptation the devil takes verses from **PSALM 91** but verses 11 and 12 are partially quoted cos they are not in the overall context of the Psalm which is all about God as Protector in ordinary life but has nothing to do with hurling ourselves off high buildings for no reason other than to see if God intervenes and stops us being smashed on the stones below. (*Psalm 91* – not an easy Psalm).

Questions to doubt rather than trust God and the words he has spoken are not uncommon. BUT “to ask for proof is not to show faith”, Caird.

How do we put God to the test? – “Sin binges” – testing the love of God. Even the best human relationships will satisfy us fully – only God reaches the parts nothing else reaches.

E.g. Does God really love me? Will God always intervene so that I don't suffer pain or death? Is my faith great enough in this circumstance – or if I went through “that”?

Jesus' rebuttals are all from Scripture and specifically from *Deuteronomy* and just the verses 6:13 to 8:3. These refer to the Wilderness experiences and failure points of Israel. As Jesus' faces this temptation he quotes: *Deuteronomy 6: 16 Do not put the LORD your God to the test (as you did at Massah* – where they argued about water. God was providing for them daily but they wanted a reservoir).

Jesus did not “fall” and his relationship with the Oneness of the Trinity is intact. BUT this is not the last time he was tempted *Verse 13* – e.g. to come down from the cross. On that occasion his obedience to Godhead and love for us again kept him obedient.

How did Jesus make a Way? By overcoming temptation. HOW?

- 1) Being sure of his Oneness with the Father and Spirit i.e. identity and purpose sure. He was sure of his “Sonship”. *Howard Marshal p174. “Again, therefore, it is the filial relationship of trust in the Father which is the object of the devil's attack”.*
- 2) His knowledge and trust of the Scriptures – God's word written which had authority for him. We need to develop this.
- 3) His obedience (learned) followed all the Way, through suffering to the cross and beyond. (We can still raise doubts but learn to trust too).
- 4) His knowledge of the enemy – the divider and also Liar. Jesus refused to make himself a martyr (prematurely). Jesus knew the Voice of Truth. He refuses to test the Father God's love.

So the divider fails: the relationship and Oneness of the Trinity is intact.