



Reflection for the First Sunday in Lent focusing on Mark 1:9-15

Do you know that feeling when you are missing a piece of a jigsaw— you are certain that it can't be any of the pieces laid out in front of you – you check the floor to see if it has fallen off the table – you assume that the puzzle is incomplete and in a sense you feel bereft. **And then you see it – it was there all along – the perfect fit – it just didn't look how you expected it to look.**



I feel like I've discovered a missing piece when I look at the Gospel reading for today. After all at the start of January we heard the first part of that passage when we considered the story of Jesus' baptism and God's declaration to him **'You are my beloved son'** and thought about how we make our response to Jesus – 'You are my Saviour'. A couple of weeks later we looked at how Jesus began his ministry with a declaration that **God's kingdom is near** – are you intrigued that that act was spurred on by the arrest of John the Baptist? His being handed over, or betrayed, foreshadowed the experience of Jesus.

Today's lectionary reading takes us back to those two brief accounts but also includes the bit that comes in the middle – **what has so far been the missing piece** – Mark's very succinct account of the temptation.

As I read again those words I see Jesus being driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit. **It's a reversal of the journey made by Joshua, in the Old Testament**, who crossed from the wilderness through the Jordan into the Promised Land. Jesus is crossing a significant border or boundary and finding himself in some sort of quarantine or isolation. Mark doesn't give us details of the specific temptations – like turning stones into bread – but he does give us this fascinating picture of **Jesus driven by the Holy Spirit into an encounter with Satan, with wild beasts and with angels**. What are we to make of that?

I wonder what image comes into your mind as you picture Jesus in that place. There is a danger that we can think that he just takes all of this in his stride, nothing scares him, he is just biding his time, keeping out of the way until the right moment. No food? That's no problem for him. Temptations –

well again they don't really faze him, he's got the perfect answers up his sleeve. As we've sung he was 'tempted, taunted and *undaunted*'.

Surely that can't be right? I like the set of **40 drawings that Si Smith** did to represent Jesus' time in the desert – the first images show him heading off as if on a sort of



adventure, but you soon see that it is not 'a walk in the park'. There are echoes in the pictures of Old Testament stories. And if you imagine him in a pristine white garment then notice how the scene develops to depict the effect that this time must have had on him.



Jesus didn't choose to go into the wilderness – just as we haven't chosen to live through a global pandemic. We feel lonely and scared, worried about the variants of Covid, bereaved and cut off from our nearest and dearest.

Jesus would have experienced hunger, tears, loneliness, fear and vulnerability. Imagine the wild landscape and the wild beasts, the presence of the one who was against him, the internal wrestling and struggles.

Coming out of the desert didn't end his struggles – he was deeply distressed by the news about John the Baptist, he encountered other 'battles' with the religious leaders, with his own disciples and with his calling to follow the way of the cross. Think of his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Because of that we know that he is there for us. He understands.

And he wasn't left alone in the wilderness; **the angels served him** or ministered unto him – just as Simon Peter's mother-in-law would do later in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel.

So today – let's put one of the missing pieces in the puzzle and see how much Jesus suffered.

Let's remember that **whatever we are going through we are not alone.**

And then let's think of anyone we know who is in a place like the wilderness right now – **how can we be one of God's angels or messengers that serves or ministers to them?**

A way to pray this week ...

Use your thumb to make a cross on your forehead and pray

'Fill my mind',

Do the same over your mouth and pray

'Speak through my lips'

And at the centre of your being, saying:

'Live in my heart'

Use this as a prayer of adoration, a prayer of confession, of offering yourself to God's service, and of prayer for others.

