

Mark 1v9-15 and Psalm 25v1-9 150222

To you, O Lord I lift up my soul.

O my God in you I trust

That is such a wonderful opening to Psalm 25 this great prayer.

We come to the start of these 40 days of prayer during Lent and can wonder what to pray and here we have the essence of prayer

To you, O Lord I lift up my soul In Hebraic fashion the people would have raised their hands towards God Lifting up their whole selves to God. O my God in you I trust. My God not someone else's God, the priests' God. some distant God, but my God and I can trust in you.

Enter Jesus

And at the start of Lent we have this reading of Jesus being baptised by John the Baptist, anointed by the Holy Spirit and being driven out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit for 40 days. Mark describes Jesus as being with the wild beasts and with angels waiting on him.

In our gospel we are in Mark's prologue which is very rich in the imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures. Mark starts his gospel with the words "The beginning" echoing Genesis "In the beginning" and the verses we have read resonate with references to Genesis, Isaiah and the Psalms heralding the fact that something really significant is happening here. Today's reading starts with the great OT expression "In those days". Into the great revival scene at the River Jordan where John is baptising comes Jesus from Nazareth. That is rather a shock. Nazareth a rather nowhere town.

For Jesus this baptism marks a break with his old life. He has always been seeking his Father's will and to grow in him but now the time has arrived at the start of his ministry.

Tearing the heavens

Now when I last spoke 4 weeks ago it was pretty much on this same passage thinking about us being drenched in water and in God's Holy Spirit. He hears those precious words you are my beloved Son I am pleased with you. Heaven is torn open and the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove. The word here for dove is *peristera* a female Greek word commonly used for a rock dove. This is not the white dove we might imagine but a rather ordinary bird resembling our wood pigeon, but a bird that is happy in the wilderness.

In this prologue we have the vision of the heavens being torn open and of God speaking and of the Spirit descending. We are reminded of Isaiah 64 "O that the Lord would rend the heavens and come down."

The Holy Spirit is the one who drives Jesus out into the wilderness, the Greek word here *ekballo* gives us the word ballistic; we might say that Jesus was propelled out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. It could also give us the idea of Jesus real need or thirst to have time with his Father.

Jesus in the wilderness

40 days in the wilderness remind us of Israel's 40 years in the wilderness, Moses 40 days up Mount Sinai and Elijah's 40 day trip to Mount Horeb to meet God. On each occasion God seems absent yet is present.

The wilderness speaks of a fallen creation; where there might be verdant pasture there is sand and rock and here Jesus faces those wild beasts both around him and within his human nature. . The world is a battlefield for Jesus mission, between good and evil. However the wilderness has also been the place where people have met God; where the rock dove is at home. A major theme of

the Old Testament as well as in the New is of God's presence with us. The central theme of Psalm 23 is "For you are with me". Those wild beasts symbolic of the chaotic and destructive world are at peace in the company of Jesus. God in Jeremiah speaks of Israel's devotion as a bride following him in the wilderness in a land not sown. In a land where God did want to sow and bring forth abundance and restoration. Isaiah declares: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom. There they shall see the glory of the LORD." There is a sense of being alone with the Father, but being in harmony with the wild beasts. The wolf will lie down with the lamb, the infant will play near the hole of the cobra

I love those paintings by Stanley Spencer of Jesus in the wilderness, particularly the one with Jesus resting on a rock surrounded by foxes darting in and out of holes and we are reminded of foxes have holes but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Clearly this is a testing time. We can feel at times all kinds of testing times. Through illness or stress or situations we might have brought on ourselves or the wild-beasts within us. Here Jesus is propelled by the Spirit into a time of testing so we could be following God and hit a dreadful time of testing.. **But even Jesus needed help.** He had angels to minister to him.

Jesus declaring the Good News

So before the wilderness God's Holy Spirit had settled on Jesus, has propelled him out into the wilderness and from there he starts his ministry in Galilee (Luke tells us "filled with the Holy Spirit" Jesus is declaring Good News "the time is fulfilled" the kingdom of God has come near repent and believe in the Good News. God's rule is breaking in. Mark in his gospel describes Jesus as Lord over nature and this is seen in the wilderness where wild beasts and

angels are brought into view. We might imagine Galilee as having quiet lake side villages. But Galilee was the centre of a humming political and commercial life. It stood at the crossroads of the nations of that ancient world. There some of the world's greatest battles had been fought. The population was thoroughly cosmopolitan. Jesus was not in some quiet backwater. He began at a place of political and religious conflict, threat, racial mixture and busy activity.

God's kingdom has come near so repent. This word repent has a much wider meaning than turning away from your sins. It is that turning one's life around, re-ordering one's life in the light of God's good news breaking out of Jesus and his Holy Spirit coming among us

Our Journey

We start Lent with God's Spirit in our hearts listening to God's voice saying "You are my beloved" We might think of Lent as a time for God's Holy Spirit to be fully free in our hearts and lives propelling us in prayer and then into the world to join God in his mission. The giving up of chocolate or wine or whatever is not the be all and end all of Lent. These are just means that might allow room us to gain a new vision of all that God wants to do in our world today. May we open our hearts to God that his Spirit might breathe through us and in knowing God's love, our lives might turn around with a new emphasis and purpose.

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