

**Text: Luke 4:1-13**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Brightons Parish Church**

**In the previous six weeks** we have spent some time looking at the early chapters of Acts and I hope that has been helpful, for I think it has raised a number of challenging and important issues for us as a congregation and as individuals within this congregation. If you are able, please review those sermons online or by CD.

**But today is the first Sunday of Lent** and it felt right to have a change of tack, even a change of approach, and so rather than work consistently through the chapters of a book of the Bible, I'm going to follow some of the Lectionary readings for this part of the Christian calendar.

**I'm excited about that because it reduces the propensity in all of us to focus on our hobby horses and instead opens the door to see what God might say to us at this time. And personally, I've loved the preparation, I'm excited to share this morning, because our Bible reading today has tied in with other reading I've been doing this week, and follows on so very appropriately from our mini-series in Acts. We book-ended the teaching in Acts with the reality that Jesus is alive, and last week with the question, whose voice will we listen to? You can't have one without the other – you can't listen to the voice of Jesus, if the voice of Jesus is dead. There's little point in listening to the voice of Jesus, if the voice of Jesus isn't the voice of God. And it's interesting that today, our reading features strongly on different voices, and which one will Jesus listen to.**

**What's more, in the last 7 sermons, stretching from November to early March, we've seen again and again that the ministry of Jesus is continuing (because He is alive) and we are each called to play our part with Him. It is a staggering truth, it was core to the early church, and hopefully it has given us a sense of drive, of direction, of purpose – some of you are probably ready to storm the gates and advance the Kingdom at any cost. For others, maybe this truth challenges you to consider the vacancy list that Eric spoke about in the notices, and consider where you might get involved, for Jesus has a place for you and a part for you to play, no matter what age or stage you are at – from praying at home, to one of the roles listed – we all are called to participate in the continuing ministry of Jesus. But in my reading this week, I'm struck by these words from Pete Greig, whom God has used mightily across the world:**

**“if our mission to this culture is to be more than a marketing campaign; if our acts of Christian mercy are to be anything more than well-meaning social work; if our churches are to be something other than religious clubs; if our voice is to ring out with the authority of prophetic dissonance in contemporary culture; if miracles are to multiply; if the gospel is to be preached ‘with signs following’; if the kingdom of God is truly to be ‘not a matter of talk but of power’; if our faith is to be a real, deepening, conversational relationship with the living God – we must discover how to pray.”**

**Helpfully Pete Greig later clarifies that in discovering how to pray, he first and foremost means how to have a real, deep relationship with Jesus. He writes:**

**“The point of prayer...is not the power that it releases but the person it reveals...I don’t pray because I’m into**

**prayer. I pray because I'm into Jesus, so we talk. I don't believe in the power of prayer. I believe in the power of Jesus, so I ask for his help. A lot."**

**So, it's good that we thought about the continuing ministry of Jesus and our part in it, for that is so crucial, and any congregation who forgets that will struggle and wane. But if we are to be a congregation who is more than simply busy - if we are to participate in that continuing ministry of Jesus in a way that truly changes lives - then we must know Jesus, and we must know Him beyond and deeper than simply head knowledge – we really, really, need to know Jesus, for ourselves, as a real person, as the Lord who is truly risen, and whose voice calls out to us even now.**

**So, what might Jesus be saying to us at the beginning of this new season of Lent? Many folks in our society think that Lent is primarily about giving up something and doing that because you are particularly religious. One newspaper did an online poll of what people were giving up during Lent that year and the top 10 included: sweets, fizzy drinks, chocolate, alcohol, procrastinating, complaining, refined sugar, cigarettes, swearing and drugs. In 2016 another newspaper reported that some of the most popular things to give up included social networking in its various forms. Giving up these things can be good for us and hopefully could bring some long-term gain. But do these particular actions get to the heart of Lent? Does foregoing a particular food or habit or activity really reflect what was going on in the desert for Jesus as He was tempted?**

**Maybe for some folks it does** – maybe they see in Jesus’ testing a reflection of what they are facing, and in His example, they find encouragement and comfort, an example of perseverance and choosing the better path. But today, I hope to help us see Jesus’ testing another way, that by taking a deeper look we may see something of the heart that guided His choices.

So, in your minds’ eye can you picture Jesus? Can you imagine Him sitting at the edge of the river Jordan? He’s not long come up from His baptism, so His clothes are soaking wet. But Father God has spoken to Him and said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I take delight.” (Lk.3:21) Such a high point for Jesus. Maybe He takes some time to bask in those encouraging words whilst His clothes dry in the sun...

**And then the whispering of the Spirit prompts Him to get up quietly, discreetly, barely noticed by anyone, and He is led into the desert for forty days and nights of fasting, at the end of which He is understandably famished. We might expect Him to be at His most vulnerable, physically weak and drained. Is He emotionally tired too? Maybe even spiritually? We don't know, but it can't have been easy.**

**And then the temptations start coming – and whilst each one presents a particular challenge, they also collectively target, and contest, His identity as the Son of Father God.**

**The tempter says to Him, “IF you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread...[and] [“No need to follow your Father’s plan] I will give you all [the] authority and splendour [of the kingdoms of the world]...**

**If you worship me...IF you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here [for the Father will save you.]”**

**There is a question here in the testing: what kind of Son is Jesus? **It is a question** that echoes back into biblical history.**

**For you see, in the approach by the devil towards Jesus, we see echoes of the serpent whispering plausible lies about God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – what kind of Son will Jesus be? Will He be like Adam, or will He be the Son that Adam should have been?**

**Similarly, we also see echoes of Israel’s history – for Israel came through the Red Sea, their water of baptism we might say, and Israel was declared God’s firstborn son, like Jesus, and Israel also wandered in the desert, like Jesus – but when in the desert, Israel grumbled for bread, turned to idolatry and put God to the test.**

**So, again, what kind of Son will Jesus be? Will He be the true firstborn Son, the true Israel, or will history repeat itself? Will Jesus be a wayward son like Adam was? Will His forty days be as wasted as the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness? What kind of Son is Jesus?**

**As you look at Jesus, as you observe His actions, as you gaze into His eyes, what do you see? What do you see of His heart? What do you see of His motivations?**

**This past week as I have sat with this passage, as I have gazed upon Jesus, I have seen a Son captivated by His Father. He is so captivated that each temptation is refused. This is a Son who completely trusts His Father, who doesn't need to test that trust, because there is no doubt within Him. This is a Son whose heart is unreservedly loyal to His heavenly Father –**

**to the extent that this Son will give up personal need and personal gain, no matter the cost, to follow His Father's call. What kind of Son is Jesus? This is a Son captivated by the Father. He is captivated to the core of His very being, and nothing is allowed to displace the Father, no other voice will be listened to above that of the Father.**

**But it would be natural to think that Jesus sort of had it easy – after all, He is the Son of God. And yet, this would be a misunderstanding of Jesus. In his time here on earth, He lived as a man – facing temptations with no other benefit than what is given to each of us. So, what helped Jesus to be – and to stay – captivated with the Father?**

**Well, as we saw, in response to each of the temptations, Jesus quoted from the Old Testament – He relied on what His Father had previously said.**

**This is not some kind of legalism, where Jesus simply follows the letter of the Law. Through these very Scriptures He has come to know Father God; Jesus has become captivated by the Father through the words of the Father. And because He is captivated by the Father, Jesus will follow the commands of the Father as a response of love. This fasting, this testing, these right answers and good behaviour...they are all evidence of a Son captivated by the Father through the words of the Father.**

**So why am I labouring this point? What relevance does this have for us during Lent 2019? Well Jesus came saying that He had come to give us life and life in abundance. This life would be full of joy and peace and contentment and purpose; not that it would be an easy life, but it would be a fuller life than we could ever imagine or achieve on our own. I don't know about you,...**

**but I want more of that kind of life, more of the kind of life Jesus experienced and offered.**

**But Jesus also said that to have that life we would need to listen to His words, follow in His footsteps and give up our man-made solutions and shortcuts to that better life. These weren't just some gimmicky ideas from Jesus – He put these to the test, He lived this out for Himself first, in these very temptations we read about today.**

**So, if it was crucial for the Son of God to be captivated by the Father, through the words of the Father, then maybe it is crucial for us? Maybe the life that Jesus evidenced, the life He offers to us...maybe that life is not possible without being captivated by the Father? And if the words of the Father were crucial for Jesus to be – and to remain – captivated by the Father,...**

**then maybe we too need to hear, need to know, need to live out the words of the Father too?**

**Or thinking back to the early church and our series in Acts – sure they knew that the ministry of Jesus was continuing and that they had a part to play in it. But what fuelled that involvement, what kept them on the right path when hardship and opposition arose, what enabled them to turn the Roman world upside down was their heart. If you look at the heart of the early church, they were a people who were captivated by the Father because of what they had seen and experienced through Jesus the Son. And because they reflected the heart of the Son, the work of the Holy Spirit in and through them was abundant and lives were changed, just as it had been with Jesus.**

**So, this Lent, how can we become people who are captivated by the Father through the words of the Father? What could that look like for you this year?**

**Maybe you should go along to the Faith Mission bookstall that is available in the hall after the service today and see what resources are available there to deepen your knowledge of the will and character of God, whether it be a Bible reading guide or a book on a specific issue, and through using these resources, as you listen to the words of the Father speaking to you afresh, your heart might be captivated a little more, chapter by chapter, week by week.**

**Or could it be that coming along to Breathing In this Saturday might give you the space and tools to breath fresh life into your relationship with God,...**

**a freshness that leads into a season of Lent where you encounter the Father in new ways and become more captivated by Him.**

**Maybe for others, it is seen** in a renewed commitment to come along to the Thursday evening prayer meeting, as Marion highlights in the news sheet, and in those evenings, in the gathering together for prayer, you might glimpse a little more of a good, faithful Father upon whom we can call for help – and your heart may become more and more captivated by such a Father.

**Or it could be, that for you,** it will be giving up something like TV, or social media, or a meal, and using that time to read a little of the Bible. Or when you feel the desire to eat or do something that you've given up, maybe that's the time you turn to Scripture...

**and listen for the whispers of a heavenly Father who loves you so dearly that His Son gave up His life for you.**

**But this Lent, do more than nothing, and do more than simply tick the religious box – I encourage you, make this a season for allowing your heart to be captivated afresh by Father God. Create space for the words of the Father to shape your heart like they shaped the heart of Jesus. And maybe, just maybe, in six weeks' time on Easter Sunday, you will look back and see a change in your heart, that you have become increasingly captivated by your heavenly Father, through the words of the Father, just like Jesus was. And maybe if we grow in that, then we may also come to know more of the abundant life Jesus experienced and offered, and we'll be in better shape to participate in the continuing ministry of Jesus.**

**Let us pray.**