

## Love Wins

Matthew 4:1-11 February 2023

When I was going up I was the only Christian in our house, and so now, I am sometimes called upon to provide 'the Christian view' on important matters. So, I was less surprised that you might imagine to receive a call from my brother towards the end of Lent a few years ago which went like this:

"Sis, he said, you have got to help me. Child Z – who would have been about 8 or 9 at that time, has done really well throughout Lent. He said he was going to give up chocolate, and he has been resolute about it. Not a morsel of chocolate or even anything chocolate flavoured has passed his lips. Not even a sniff. But here's the thing - we are going to Mum's for Sunday Lunch and she is making chocolate mousse. We think there will be a meltdown – you have got to talk to child Z and give him some sound theological reasons as to why it's ok for him to enjoy some chocolate mousse today, even though it's still Lent."

This notion of bargaining with God – edging in the bounds the grace, flexing the perimeters of acceptability – so both so much part of the human condition and so far from the example of Jesus in today's Gospel.

We know how this Gospel story ends – Love Wins. Completely, utterly, resolutely. At huge cost. And not with some sort of grubby Poundland compromise. So I share that story with you – because as we start our Lenten observations, I wonder whether Lent has become for some of us a kind of transaction with God, a negotiation, a 40 day deal to be done, rather than a welcome and necessary opportunity to reflection on our own Christian journey – a reaffirmation of our commitment to Christ.

What we can learn from today's Gospel:

1. Verses 1 & 2 – Jesus is alone, hungry, vulnerable. Temptation comes, not when we are warmly cocooned in embrace of our loved ones. Temptation often comes when we are alone, vulnerable, weak through physical need or emotional distress. What does this mean for who we look after and how we look after ourselves?
2. Verses 3-10 – Jesus has a conversation with the devil; who appeared to hold out a promises of:
  - a. immediate physical relief – bread,
  - b. emotional security – test God to see if He will keep His Promises,
  - c. Worldly worship – an easy route to power
3. Jesus responds by quoting Scripture - mostly Deuteronomy 6 & 8. I would encourage you to take the time to read Deuteronomy 6 & 8 this week – for they tell of a God of love, a God of provision, and a God who is to be worshipped.
4. Jesus talks to the devil – He doesn't run away screaming, He doesn't ignore the devil – but he engages in a conversation anchored in Scripture. There's no time today to get into the presence or absence of devils, but C S Lewis is helpful here I think – in the Screwtape Letters he says: "There are two equal and opposite errors our race can fall into when thinking about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence, the other is to believe, and feel an unnecessary and unhealthy interest in them. They are equally pleased by both errors..."
5. Verse 11: When Jesus commands the devil to leave – he does – and then Jesus is attended by angels – messengers of God. We don't know what they said to Him – but what they

demonstrate to us – is that God saw Jesus being tempted, He didn't leave him, and nor did He remove Jesus from that encounter. Temptation was part of Jesus' life and it will be part of ours.

So, given all of that, how did Jesus resist temptation and what we can learn from Him – today?

Firstly – what was Jesus doing in the desert anyway? He was preparing for his public ministry. Even Jesus – the Son of God, spent time preparing, thinking, praying, wrestling with the devil – working out his relationship with the God, His priorities, before his public ministry began.

Secondly – before he went into the desert Jesus was soaked in Scripture - he had studied it – he was brought up on it – so that when he needed to engage with the devil – Jesus had the relevant Scriptures to lean on. He didn't need to question the character of God – as he had all of the history of God's relationship with Israel to call upon.

Thirdly – Jesus' season of temptation in the desert was, in the end, time limited – after encountering the devil and resisting him – Jesus commands the devil to leave – and he does. Temptation ends. Love Wins.

I want to play my part in ensuring that Love Wins – in our family, in this parish, in my workplace, in my children's school..... which means I want to commit myself this Lent to doing what Jesus did. Will you join me in:

Preparing again for your ministry – so that when your friends and family, your colleagues ask you again why you spend so much time at church / living your faith when you could be doing a million other things, you have an answer, anchored in your relationship with God.

Soaking ourselves in scripture so that when faced with temptation - our faith may not fail – we hold firm.

Giving of ourselves – this Lent, take up something that makes a difference, denying ourselves for a season, looking again at your donations and ask if there is more that we could do. Lets spend this season in the presence of God.

Finally reminding ourselves and each other again and again that we know the end of the story for today and for eternity. The season of temptation ends. Love, that tastes even better than my Mum's chocolate mousse, wins. Love Wins.

Amen.