

## **Choral Eucharist, Lent 1**

**Gen 2: 15-17, £:1-7, Romans 5: 12-19 and Matthew 4, 1-11.**

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Temptation – it's a very powerful thing isn't it?

I don't know about you but I'm generally very bad at resisting temptation – the minute someone offers me something I'd really quite like... a glass of wine, a chocolate... then I'm a goner – the words “no thank” you just don't seem to work very well for me!

There are other more subtle forms of temptation – the temptation to rely on our own strength – to try and control all aspects of our lives, to provide for all our worldly desires, rather than being able to live in uncertainty - the temptation to not trust God or be open to the prompts of the Holy Spirit.

What about the temptation to crave success and recognition – to want to “be someone” – to have a voice and a say in decisions – rather than being willing to live in obscurity, subject to what others decide? It goes against our very individualistic and success focussed culture to even suggest such things, doesn't it? But this is exactly what Jesus does and these are the temptations he resists.

Let's look at each of them in our gospel reading.

Firstly turning a stone into bread. On the face of it this really doesn't seem so bad – after all, God does not want his people to be hungry. But this temptation runs deeper than just having something to eat – it is about whether we are willing to live unsatisfied – not always getting what we want, and still being able to find God. And what about the invitation to exploitation - assuming the stone is there for his use? Jesus is being asked to turn what is not meant to be eaten, into an object he can exploit. “As if the stone has no intrinsic value, beauty, or goodness, apart from Jesus's ability to possess and consume it.” This is probably one of the biggest temptations we face, and it so often goes unrecognised. The environmental and sustainability movements are challenging us, but largely we still don't really get it – we still prioritise our own desires and needs over that of the wildlife, the seas, over our fragile and beautiful world. We are abusing the gifts that God has given us and not giving creation the care that it deserves, just to ensure our desires are satisfied – we are giving in to this first temptation on a regular basis.

The second temptation is about vulnerability and the lie that God will protect us from harm, and always keep us safe. This is the lie we want so much to believe because it speaks to our deepest fears. We live in a broken, dangerous world and we want to believe that God will rescue us, protect us, shield us. But as Debie Thomas writes “if the cross teaches us anything, it teaches us that God’s precious children still bleed, still ache, still die. We are loved *in* our vulnerability. Not out of it.”

The last temptation is to power, fame, ego. And how tempting this is, in our culture of twitter, social media and celebrities....we are already seeing our children suffer from the impact of these things, and yet we still long for recognition, we still long to have a say in all decisions that impact us and if we’re honest, many of us long to be admired, maybe even envied. And yet Jesus turns his back on all of these things – he is constantly trying to avoid the spotlight, he regularly commands people to tell no-one what they have seen and eventually he gives up all his power, gives up his voice, and allows himself to be abused, beaten and killed.

It is so hard for us today to embrace Jesus’ version of significance – one borne of humility and surrender. Are we able to be content with God seeing us, even when the powers that be do not? Can we really thrive in quiet places? *“The uncomfortable truth about authentic Christian power is that it resides in weakness. Jesus is lifted up — but he’s lifted up on a cross.”*

It is the cross that we are now turning to face – as we journey through the season of lent, we are invited to acknowledge our humanity, our weakness and our sinfulness. To sit patiently with desire, with vulnerability, with weakness and still embrace our identity as God’s beloved, is hard. Maybe we, like Jesus, need long stints in the wilderness to learn what it means to be God’s precious children. The unnerving reality is this: we can be loved and hungry at the same time. We can hope and hurt at the same time. We can be beloved and unsafe at the same time. And learning to trust takes time.... Maybe this is what Lent is really about.

As Debie Thomas says – *“it’s time to decide who we are and whose we are... Lent is not a time to do penance for being human. It’s a time to embrace all that it means to be human. Human and hungry. Human and vulnerable. Human and beloved - May the God who loves us even in the wilderness, grant us a holy Lent.”*

Ref: Debie Thomas, JourneywithJesus.net