

**Sermon for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022 (Lent 1) 'Beware of the wasp at the picnic'**  
from Fr. Mike.

[Deuteronomy 26.1-11; **Psalm 91.1-2,9-16**; Romans 10.8b-13; **Luke 4.1-13**]

We all know someone who is a bit like the proverbial wasp at a picnic - no matter how often we try to 'swat' them away they seem to have endless resilience to hover in our peripheral vision, and almost immediately, to our abiding frustration, return! Not once, not twice, but *repeatedly*.

The Devil (**Satan**) behaved in this waspish way when he persistently tried on three predatory occasions to convince Jesus to do his bidding. Jesus, as we learn from Luke this morning, tries to give a succinct yet honest and forthright reply to each sly attempt. Satan's tactic is to persist with his second perversion until finally Jesus says - will you just 'go away' (or as the KJV records, '**Get thee behind me Satan**'). Satan of course, did not. He tried once again, and for this third (and final?) attempt to divert Jesus from his divine work. All three devious attempts ended in failure. The reader can now instinctively cry, 'Hurray! Well-done Jesus!' Job done. In one sense of course this is true. In this Gospel reading we see Jesus giving Satan a metaphorically bloody nose. However, **beware** of the wasp at the picnic...

Even when Satan *seemed* to have vanished, the scripture drops a deceptively simple clue, contained in the final three words of this extract. They are words well worth remembering - '**for a season**'(v.13) or as Satan might say, "until the next time"... which we do not always immediately recognise.

## **When competing agendas become frustrating – what can we do?**

Sometimes it is tempting to be robust from the outset. This would of course be unkind as a starting point, and we know it. So (apart from those born with a skin of a rhinoceros) we reason, hint, try and deploy as much tact as we can muster, or in final desperation even physically remove ourselves from the uncomfortable scene to avoid the encounter becoming either personal or confrontational.

How does our Lord Jesus react? Today's incident shows his only option was to engage. But just look (and learn) by *how* he did that!

### **The three temptations of Jesus**

The temptations which Luke records for us give an insight into the issues that Jesus was wrestling with during his forty days in the wilderness:

**Temptation 1: (Satan) Stones to bread - Jesus Answers: ‘...man shalt not live by bread alone’**

*“Tell these stones to become bread”* – The first dilemma which Jesus faced was how to use his miraculous power, whether to use it for selfish reasons or to help others.

**Temptation 2: Kingdoms of the World (by force) - Answer: ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’**

*“If you do as I say and agree to worship me, all these worldly kingdoms will be yours.”*

Kingship by force has never endured.(World leaders have still to learn this lesson). Jesus knows this and plays the long game to present a better way based upon service, duty, calling and most of all, compassion.

**Temptation 3: Jump from the Temple - Christ Answers: ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’**

*“The angels will protect you if you are the Son of God, so prove it!”*

People are sometimes tempted to view holy scripture through the narrow lens which suits their own purposes or prejudices. Apart from the obvious rebuke to emphasise divine authority, Jesus reminds us that we are here simply to glorify God rather than prosecute our own agendas.

All the above responses from Jesus to the temptations presented by Satan absorb the inevitable human frustration which accompanies each one, equally communicating gravitas, authority and most of all, integrity. This is transformative.

### **Where is the 'wasp' that throws us off course?**

Whether you prefer to use language such as "Satan", "the Devil," "prince of darkness" or whatever label best describes the malevolent 'anti-Christ' for you, it is true to say that the 'unholy spirit' (Evil) persists – particularly during Lent.

Furthermore, it is not always presented in an obvious or annoying format. Evil can certainly be 'passive-aggressive' to use modern parlance. Even more compelling is when Evil plays the master stroke of appearing to be 'oh *so reasonable*' and as such, on the face of it, making perfect sense. Deliberately dig a little deeper, pause a while to reflect (or even to pray) and the deception is swiftly exposed for what it truly is – a distorted perversion of the path God asks us to follow.

The wilderness experience battered Jesus, and almost destroyed him at times, so this season of Lent will challenge each one of us who seriously tries to follow his example.

### **Where is James Bond when we need him?**

Today we are reminded that if we hold fast to the first principles set out for us by Christ, enduring the inevitable daily temptations facing all Christians (especially

during the season of Lent) not to take the easy or 'reasonable' route, we will eventually emerge better people and as a community closer to God than to Satan.

This is clearly the good news.

The bad news is that meanwhile it can certainly be a long and bumpy ride on the journey to righteousness.

**And when you are brought to the 'pinnacle' and challenged to jump – what will you do?**

We have to deliberately leave our comfort-zone (enter the 'wilderness') to become open to whatever God is perpetually trying to communicate. Perhaps you may be asked to engage with a form of worship that is not altogether familiar? Perhaps there is a charitable activity which requires some personal involvement or support? Maybe, you are asked to take on something new for the benefit of either yourself or others?

Who knows what the Lord specifically requires of us as individuals and as a community during *this* Lent that he did not ask of us in the Lent season of 2021.

Jesus calls us to be spiritually 'street-wise' and alert to the reality that whatever Evil *seems* to have disappeared, will often return with greater effect. Do not drop your guard. We have been given the necessary tools to combat Evil in all its forms, yet there is often a reluctance to engage. It was part of Jesus' struggle. It is part of our struggle. The Lent discipline will help. You and I will become like James Bond (shaken but not stirred). Often shaken by negative experiences, yes, but never stirred to such an extent that we are ruined by the process. So, **beware** "until the next time"...consoled by the Holy Angels, who as promised, will faithfully ensure none of us will be broken beyond repair, if we simply follow Christ. Amen!

Fr. Mike, Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022 (Lent 1)