

no-one else. Please, if you discover you have any of us on pedestals stop trying to keep us there ~ it dishonours God and tempts us!

There is nothing wrong with questioning God to seek confirmation of what we believe He is saying ~ that safeguards us from being misled. But that is different from the bargaining with God that challenges what happens in the world against a God we expect to make everything better! God doesn't always make things better He supports us in journeying through the grot! We should not test God in that way or indeed by taking deliberate and selfish risks expecting His protection. Jesus says no to the temptation of jumping from a very great height ~ it would be one thing to fall accidentally and call on God but not jump deliberately to see if God will respond!

How does that effect any of us ~ we cannot respond to a selfish desire claiming God is calling us to do it if that in turn denies the privilege of the responsibilities that God has already given us. *Let me give you an example. My sending priest, the man that directed me to Ordination, was accused by his daughter of allowing the church to steal him from her. He was horrified until we worked through together that if the church made a demand on him he 'jumped to it' even if that meant neglecting his wife, children and grandchildren! He was not totally to blame ~ the church of 30 years ago trained us that ministry (not necessarily God) came first! Does your employment do that to you today? The classic excuse is to ensure you can pay the bills ~ but are the bills essential or for luxuries that you could do without?*

Jesus was not tempted but we can be easily! So we need to learn what God's Word teaches us so that what is in our hearts and our mouths is truly Christlike and not just of our creation.

When we get it right we experience the depth of Gods provision. We find we never go without the absolute essentials. If we persist in going it alone we can fall and burn! I invite you to use the 40 days of Lent to allow the Spirit to sort the myths from the Truth ~ clearing the decks of the temptations ~ that is called rending your hearts and the Lord says to Joel tell the people to "rend your hearts NOT your garments!" So lets get on with it. Amen.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent 10th March 2019

Heavenly Father,  
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,  
and grew closer to you in the desert:  
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer that we may witness to your saving love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Readings:

Deuteronomy 26.1-11 OT page 188

Romans 10.8b-13 NT page 156

Luke 4.1-13 NT page 58

(NIV used in sermon preparation).

The Christian faith holds to the truth that "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ".

In the church today, sadly that is not necessarily true ~ let me explain. There is an elephant in the room!

Many of us originally come to call ourselves Christians by default! That does not mean that we are not sincere ~ we are ~ we believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour and accept Him in our lives ~ BUT then what do we do about it? Often, not a lot ~ and that is why I say we come by default ~ maybe through our family upbringing or maybe through our peer group as teenagers or young adults but unless we have been very fortunate we probably have not received the teaching we need to be nourished as disciples and by the time we realise what we are lacking we are afraid or embarrassed to do anything about it ~ so we come to church ~ respond to what is being taught and go back home again ~ occasionally we let it influence our lives and activities but often we fall into the trap of going through the motions!

I have identified the elephant in the room and now we can work out what to do about it!

Because we routinely walk round the elephant, what is in our hearts

and mouths tends to be what we have been taught by our previous generation and they have received that teaching from their predecessors ~ so we end up believing a blend of truth and myth, much of which has borne fruit in its time but it is not necessarily what God's Word has for us today. ~ The Truth remains but its relevant application is lost in translation! No wonder the wider world accuses us of irrelevance!

As good disciples we need to ensure that God's word nourishes us for today ~ that we do not take it for granted/work on default, but seek to know how to apply it in our lives. You see the problem with default is that it is not personalised!

Being obedient to God requires that we examine His Word and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us its teaching for us today ~ and that can be really exciting.

Paul reassures us that "Anyone who believes in him (Christ) will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile ~ the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". So you and I have nothing to lose! We are all able to live as God desires. All it requires is that we call on Him. Is that so very difficult? Calling on God needs to be given time each day ~ if only five minutes. It can be done at Leisure and in a quiet space or on the commute to work on crowded public transport or through headphones walking to the supermarket! But how many of us plan God into our day?

You will begin to get the picture ~ an hour and a bit at church on a Sunday morning is simply not enough ~ it's a good start but Sunday morning is about worshipping and praising God and being inspired to learn more for ourselves.

We have suggested Lent reading. ~ If you can start creating the habit of "God time" in the forty days of Lent ~ then it might just become not only natural but something that you don't do by habit but because you actually want to! Does that surprise you ~ what God will reveal to you and how His Word will influence your life will surprise you more I promise!

So now let's take a quick look at the reading in Deuteronomy. The people are told that when they enter the land God gives them then they are to take the firstfruits of all they produce and give them

back to the Lord as a thank offering for His provision. That teaching has not changed ~ so how can we interpret it today? God still provides for each of us but how do we give any of that provision back to Him? We come and sing praises and thank Him but we do not follow the practical side of the teaching.

You may not realise so I will tell you ~ the giving in this church is diabolical ~ it is as if you give in response for what David, Marion and I can offer you as a Service package week by week and not for what God gives you every day which actually has very little to do with us! The people of God are told to give back to Him for His provision not to give back to Him according to small part His called ministers play in that provision!

Would it surprise you to know how disillusioned we three get to feel when none of our efforts are enough ~ or at least appear to have no impact at all? It makes us question whether we are conveying anything of God's love to you ~ even worse ~ it puts us on pedestals that we simply can't perch on safely and puts demands on us that we cannot realistically meet.

Our gospel explains to us that at the onset of His earthly ministry Jesus is tested to see if His humanity will win out over His divinity. It never will of course, but it illustrates for us the opportunity to be Christ like in our responses to the temptations around us.

It is a very human thing to feel hunger not just the gut wrenching pain of needing to eat food but the hollow created by spiritual starvation. The problem is we disguise spiritual starvation as something that is not our fault ~ claiming there is nothing to feed on! What utter rubbish ~ aids to grow our spirituality are all around us ~ the difficult bit is working out what is God given and what is false. Jesus knew that hunger was not just sated by food for our stomachs but food for our souls and that is how he rejected the first temptation. For those of us in ministry the temptation to cling to the top of the pedestal we are put on can be very real ~ and even when we suppress it can be ever present. Who is not complimented by being told they are loved and appreciated. But our calling is to remain true to what God's Word reveals to us and that might lead to us being unpopular! When the devil tempted Jesus with all power and authority over the material world Jesus rebuked him saying that we should worship the Lord our God only and nothing or