

Reflections for 21st February 2021

1st Sunday of Lent

Wilderness times

For the first Sunday in Lent, we return to the gospel accounts of the testing of Jesus in the wilderness, in which we are told that immediately after his baptism, Jesus withdrew to prepare for the public ministry that he was about to begin. And alongside that our story this week is based on the account from the book of Exodus of the forty years that God's people spent in the wilderness, wandering and waiting until the time was right for them to enter God's promised land.

The image of 'wilderness' runs as a thread through the Bible, and also through our Christian tradition – in the idea of a time and a place set apart for testing, and for being renewed. We see this in the monastic tradition, in the best of the traditions and customs associated with Lent, and also in the recent revival of interest in retreats and pilgrimages.

But this year it would be understandable if we felt that we have all had enough wilderness experiences already at the moment, without the church adding to them! Some of us are still shielding, and all of us are living with some level of restrictions, and we are bound to be aware of all the things that we would usually be doing, but that we cannot do at the moment.

But in today's gospel, and the story of the time that Jesus spent in the wilderness, we can be reminded of the hope that, although 'wilderness' times can be hard and testing, they can also be times of blessing, if we will let God work with us. Then a wilderness time may become a time that will help us to discover a new and deeper understanding of our calling, and a time that renews our strength and faith to live a life of serving God by the way that we serve others.

Revd John Waller

Almighty God,
whose Son spent forty days in the wilderness,
and was tested as we are:
renew us by your Holy Spirit,
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

Bible readings: Genesis 9. 8-17; 1 Peter 3. 18-22; Mark 1. 9-15

Story: 'A Long Journey' – God provides for the Hebrew people in the wilderness
(based on the book of Exodus)