

Lent 1 Reflection: Promised and Sent ([Mark 1: 9-15](#) and [1 Peter 3: 18-22](#))

When I went to the Holy Land just prior to coming to Thornton Hough, one of the many highlights of the pilgrimage was going to the River Jordan. I had the privilege of helping some fellow pilgrims into the water as they renewed their baptismal vows. It was enormously moving – people of all ages being immersed in the water, declaring their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. They were reminded of the way that Christ died and rose again, and being raised out of that water brought to life the promise that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that all who live and believe in him will never die.



The Jordan is not how the films portray it: a wide, sparkling river, whose banks allow the crowds to come to the waters with ease: it is an uneven, muddy ribbon of water and reeds have grown in its banks. You certainly wouldn't want to drink it, and you won't get clean by bathing in it. When I came out of the water, not only was I dripping wet, but my clothing had dark, scummy tide-marks which took some cleaning afterwards.

Yet out of the dirt and messiness of the water, God's grace and love flowed.

I wonder how clean the Jordan was when John the Baptist baptised Jesus? It might have been a wider river, but with the crowds of people coming to throng the banks to see John and gathering to be baptised, I imagine that it would have been pretty muddy then, too.

But even in the dirt and messiness of the water then, God's grace and love flowed. The promise of God

coming to reunite earth's brokenness with the glory of heaven is made manifest. Heaven is torn open, and God the Holy Spirit rests upon Jesus as a gentle dove. God the Father's voice thunders from heaven, affirming his love for Jesus. This is the promise of a new beginning.

A tidier, a more easily digestible version of the life of Christ would edit out what happens next. Surely Jesus should go out and start doing his miracles, healing the sick, teaching the people after this thunderous endorsement?

That's not the way it happens. His journey to the wilderness is not some kind of slow journey after a few weeks' celebrating and reflecting on the enormity of that event at the Jordan, but a sudden, abrupt move: "At once". He is "sent out" by the Holy Spirit, into an utterly inhospitable environment with "wild animals", tempted by Satan for forty days.

Jesus is sent into the harsh, dirty, hungry extremes of life. His baptism is a reminder of his identity, a promise of a glorious future, but it doesn't mean that he is withdrawn from

suffering. Rather, here in this lonely place, he is stripped bare and asked what really matters.

The season of Lent sends us on a journey. We journey knowing that, upon us, within us and before us, is the seal of baptism, the promise that Jesus died and rose again for us. This doesn't make us perfect or "clean". Life is messy and complex. Yet Lent gives us the opportunity to take stock. We have the opportunity to strip back all the "stuff" of our life. What really matters? What does this promise that Jesus makes to us mean to me?

Where I am I being sent out? What is God's calling for me? And what glimpses of his glory might we see as we ask those questions this Lent?

Lent

Barer than blackthorn in its winter sleep,
All unadorned. Unlike Christmas which decrees
The setting-up, the dressing-up of trees,
Lent is a taking down, a stripping bare,
A starkness after all has been withdrawn
Of surplus and superfluous,
Leaving no hiding-place, only an emptiness
Between black branches, a most precious space
Before the leaf, before the time of flowers;
Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,
Lest we should miss the stars.

Jean M. Watt

The Collect for the First Sunday of Lent

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.

Revd Vicky Barrett