

# **Sermon on Sunday 21 February 2021**

## **by Melanie Seward**

Readings: Psalm 25. 1-9; Mark 1. 9-15



### **No need to be perfect, just come as you are**

Lent - a time of reflection and self-examination in preparation for Easter; associated with the discipline of giving up things and making sacrifices. Lent recalls Jesus seeking God in the desert-wilderness for 40 days and highlights the sacrifices he made for us, including his being put to death on the Cross. Lent 2021 began last Wednesday, which was the day we call 'Ash Wednesday'. Although many observe the Sundays of Lent, technically the forty days of Lent do not include Sundays in them – so, technically, tomorrow we will be on day five.

So, how are we all doing?

I guess that there are a variety of responses from those of you tuning in to this on Zoom. Amongst us, some will have a list of what they have given up placed under a fridge magnet, or committed to read a chapter of a book in the Bible each day or to pray for a different country each day. Or, again maybe for Lent, you are going to give up a set time each week to help others - a positive sacrifice, but lots of us have been supporting each other throughout Covid times!

Let's be honest - our real responses might have been: Lent? Is it still happening this year? I'm not really in the mood. I'm just getting

through one day at a time, one week of shielding after another. Maybe thoughts of getting through another week of home schooling, or keeping a job and a roof over your head, seem quite enough.

Many of us will be experiencing Lent in a time of loss; the loss of loved ones, of opportunities we used to enjoy, of time to be spent otherwise, of immediate connection with family and friends, of relationships on hold. This Lent we find ourselves trying to keep a season experiencing weakness, frustration, boredom and a deep yearning for things to stop being as they are.

Nothing is the same in Covid times, and this includes Lent. Think about it. Pancake parties are out. No 'ashing' in church. No ecumenical Lent groups or talks. Christian Aid Lunches in the Theatre are forbidden. Who knows where we will be for Holy Week.

Hang on... Church is not about getting in the right frame of mind to 'do' God or 'do' Lent as 'normal'. The season of Lent is to be engaged with and participated in as we find ourselves to be and **not** as we would like ourselves to be, in the place we would like to be. Instead in Lent, as in any other time of the year, it is important to be honest with ourselves and with God; we need to acknowledge our true feelings and, I suggest, be generous with ourselves in our opening up to the love of God. If Lent is about taking the barriers down and drawing nearer to God, what can we take from our **Gospel** reading to help us?

In our Gospel, Jesus the Son of God goes with all manner of people to be baptised by John. It doesn't seem to make sense to say that he needed to repent, turn from evil and have his sins washed away. Rather, Jesus' baptism reminds us that repentance, or turning around, is not **just** about turning away from evil but also about turning **towards** and **opening** up. The Jesus on earth is opening himself up to God the Father in order to take on his calling and ministry.

This Lent, maybe avoid starting with what has gone wrong/needs to change and simply concentrate on turning to God and acknowledging/sharing where we are with life at this moment.

Secondly, having been baptised Jesus is sent by the Spirit into the Wilderness. Here he undergoes not just temptation but confrontation with evil itself. This is more than a personal experience of temptation;

it's part of an ongoing cosmic battle. Mark gives us the image of Satan himself failing to tempt Jesus who can stand up to pure evil. We glimpse a Jesus able to live amongst the beasts of a corrupted creation and see him as Son of God tended to by angels. Although Satan or evil is not destroyed (and Jesus will still confront the evil very much present in the world hereafter), the evil spirits encountered by Jesus will recognise the power of God and obey Jesus' commands.

We can approach God knowing that Jesus, as God made man, experienced temptation and the forces of evil. His experienced knowledge of human life means there is nothing that we cannot share, there is nothing that we need to withhold, there is nothing that he cannot work with us on and forgive.

Finally, in our reading, Jesus goes into Galilee and preaches the Good News. He proclaims, 'The time **is** fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.' Let us understand, in the depths of our being, that with Jesus' arrival everything changes; the kingdom of God **is** breaking through. For us Christ has died and risen from the dead, he has overcome the darkness; because of the Cross the barriers that are put up by corruption, sin, and evil **are** being torn down. As Archdeacon Janet reminded us last week, the transformative light of Christ can power our transformation towards being more as God intends us to be.

As Psalm 25 puts it, God instructs sinners, is steadfast in his love and leads us into his truth. Jesus, as the transforming light brings light to us and our world - we do not have to be perfect or in the right place to approach God or do it all by ourselves. We simply need to sit with God and open ourselves up to the wonder and possibilities of his love. Sit with God, open up, and let him do the rest. Simply sit with God this Lent.

*Just as I am, though tossed about  
with many a conflict, many a doubt,  
fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:*

*because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, thy love unknown  
has broken every barrier down;  
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come.*

From the Hymn 'Just as I am' - Charlotte Elliott 1789-1871