

## **2022 TALK FOR CAREY, 13.3.22, 1 KINGS 19:1-13, MATTHEW 4:1-11**

### **KEEPING IT SIMPLE**

I have been working on an important theory this week. By a simple reading of my Bible and of this story in Matthew 4, I have arrived at a profound, new revelation. And this is it: I reckon Jesus was a Yorkshireman... (I know what you are thinking... I've really lost the plot this time!)

But listen to this...! We already know Jesus was a northerner. But what reinforces this simple belief of mine (you may prefer to call it northern prejudice) is this: Jesus liked to call a spade a spade. He didn't muck about. He didn't mince his words. He was very blunt and direct, just like my nan and my dad. He said, 'Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no"'. So, he had a strong taciturn streak. And we can also see this during his temptation in the wilderness. He used as few words as possible to resist the enemy. And he always used some very direct scriptures. And didn't hesitate to tell the devil where to go. Jesus was just about as blunt as a human being can be, while still being full of grace and love.

It could well have been Jesus who coined the phrase: 'there's nought so queer as folk'... You can imagine him saying this as he weeps over Jerusalem or challenges the thinking of the Pharisees and so-called 'teachers of the law'.

It's true though isn't it? 'There's nought so queer as folk'. And I include myself in that description. I realise that I am a bit weird. But then, most of us are in one way or another.

For my talk today, I have managed to arrive, somehow, at a three point sermon. This is based on Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus. And the point of each of these points is to remind us of the importance of keeping things simple. Of not over-thinking and over-complicating things. In times of crisis, this is even more important than usual.

These are three temptations which Jesus avoided, and these are not exactly the same as the three temptations described here in Matthew.

1) Firstly, Jesus avoided the temptation of too many words. You can imagine the enemy trying to get Jesus to engage in a long, theological debate about who he was and what he was doing there. But each time, Jesus cuts off any further discussion. The only words that Jesus is interested in are the words of God. He knows that God's word will sustain him, however hungry he gets. (Just

as an aside here, it is interesting to read Jesus' temptation in parallel with Elijah's journey to the mountain of God. Here, the angel of the LORD insists that Elijah needs to eat in order to survive this difficult journey).

One of the things which Lent should teach us is that less is more. And one thing we don't need so much of is words. Words that we say without thinking. Words which come from our sinful nature. Words that our political leaders spout out to conceal the truth. Each day we are in danger of drowning in a tsunami of words. But what Lent teaches us, as well as the Christian contemplative tradition, is that we can often learn a lot more from silence. This is why God's Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness. To find a silence in which he could hear God's voice. This is why, every morning, Jesus sought out remote, quiet places to be alone with his Heavenly Father. And this is why Jesus knows he doesn't need to put God's love for him to the test, by throwing himself off the temple, for example. Jesus simply knows His Heavenly Father loves him.

And this is why Jesus had such a massive impact on human history: because he uniquely embodied what it was to be a child of God. He simply took time to listen to God. Each day. Every moment.

2) The second temptation Jesus resisted was the temptation to have too much stuff. The enemy showed him the splendour of all the Kingdoms of the world. And he said: 'All this could be yours'... It's funny. There are two reactions Jesus could have had to this particular temptation. He might have thought, 'Why do I need all that? I'm just one guy. And I've got all I need right here, in the wilderness'. And on another level he might have thought: 'I don't need you to give all this to me. It's already mine anyway'. As the Psalmist writes, 'The cattle on a thousand hills belong to God. The whole earth belongs to the LORD'.

But Jesus keeps it simple and quotes scripture at this enemy. A verse which is very simple: 'worship the LORD your God - serve God only'. The simplicity of this command brings us back to the heart of the challenge of Lent. How much of our time do we spend serving ourselves? Helping ourselves to what we think is our share, what we deserve? I know this is true from my own greed. I am very quick to help myself. The lure and the attraction of what the enemy calls 'all these things' is all too real.

Let me put this another way. This is what we learn from Lent. This is what we learn from Elijah and Jesus. This is what we learn from our continuing challenge of climate chaos. This is what we learn from the Ukraine war and

refugee crisis: it is vital we learn to live more simply. It is vital that this Lent and after this Lent we learn to say 'no' to more things, more stuff. Jesus himself, as well as those 2 million (and counting) Ukrainian refugees remind us how little we really need to live in this world. The next time you think about buying something new, ask yourself: 'Do I really need this ?' And also: 'Is there something better I can spend this money on ?' There is also this question: 'What do I have that I could usefully give away ?'

3) The third temptation Jesus resisted each time he answered the enemy was this: the temptation of too little God. Jesus had no appetite for all the devil was offering. Therefore Jesus had a much bigger appetite for God. We can never have enough of God or too much of God. This is simple... Too simple ?

Jesus was led by God's Spirit into the wilderness. And Jesus was led by the Spirit out of the wilderness, so that he could proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. This is simple. And it leads to a simple question or two. This Lent, how much are we being led by God's Spirit ? How hungry are we for God, instead of other stuff ? How hungry are you for God in this wilderness of 2022?.

It's funny. I've preached about us speaking and hearing too many words. Now I am in danger of saying too much and going on too long! That part of me that is Yorkshire, that is determined to follow Jesus is telling me to be quiet. To be still before the LORD and to simply seek his face. Just as Elijah did on the mountain of God. Just as Jesus did in the wilderness.

Let's do that now shall we ? Let's spend the rest of my talk being quiet before the LORD. What God says to you in the next few minutes could be more significant than all the words I have ever preached throughout over 30 years in ministry.

... God said to Elijah: 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD'... We don't need a mountain. We don't need to stand. But we do need our God, the One who in Jesus came to seek and save us...

QUIET

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