

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Lent 1C*

*Sunday 6 March 2022*

*Attending to God*

All of us have wilderness experiences at one time or another – a time when we are challenged or vulnerable.

The last couple of years for many have felt like a time in the wilderness when we have experienced disruption and felt tested.

Jesus experienced time in the wilderness.

Not only was he away from normal life, but he was physically stretched weak with hunger.

It is then that the voice of the devil sounds in his ear.

In his state of weakness Jesus had to decide whose voice he pays attention to and what choices he will make.

When we are challenged, when our lives are at a low ebb it is often difficult to decide whose voice we trust.

These are often defining moments for our community and for us individually.

When we are under pressure how will we respond? What is most important to us?

Sitting in the background to this story is the story of the Jewish people who wandered around in the desert for 40 years and continually tested God and gave into their fears and then being

formed into a new community prepared to become the nation of Israel.

This testing experience defined who they were and who God was for them.

If you are the son of God... says the devil. If you pay attention to your status and authority you can pay attention to providing what you want for yourself.

Perhaps the question being asked is : Do you only pay attention to yourself and your own needs? Is that what is only important? If it is why not just use your power just to satisfy yourself?

Jesus responds by focussing on God. One does not live by bread alone quoting Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy goes on to say but by every word that comes from God's mouth.

Jesus does not give into the voice of fear and hunger and lack but pays attention to God's words and trust in God who alone provides what we need.

The voice again asks a question of Jesus. Worship me – trust in earthly power. Get the status you want for yourself.

Jesus again does not yield to the voice that want to grasp what control and power you can find for yourself.

Jesus again pays attention to the voice of God – the call to depend on God – to worship and serve only the divine.

The third question invites Jesus to throw himself down off the temple – to put God's promises to the test and to provide a spectacle.

Perhaps the question foreshadows what Jesus will face in the garden of Gethsemane praying for the cup to be removed.

Jesus is able to distinguish the voice that twists scripture and warp it to permit putting God to the test. He responds differently to how the Jewish people responded in the wilderness as they complained about God's provision and sought their own way.

How does this story of Jesus' testing say to us today as we begin Lent.

This story reminds us that Jesus was a human being who experienced testing times that stretched him to his limits like we do.

The testing times help to define who Jesus is as Son of God and what he is about and who he relies on.

It can prompt us to ask ourselves whose voices do we pay attention to in life?

Which voices do we listen to in the cacophony of voices baying for our attention?

Do we listen to the voice that says our needs are met by how many like we get on Instagram or Facebook, or by numbing ourselves with distractions from the needs of our world and our own woundedness.

How much do we pay attention and make room for the voice of love, to God's voice.

How often do we pray and rely on God's word.

Do we listen to the voice that says we don't have enough and that we need to be in control?

Or do we pay attention to God's voice that calls us to trust in God and worship God alone.

Do we pay attention to the need in us to seek the limelight?

Do we only trust in God if it is on our terms, what we want?

The invitation of Lent is to notice what we give our attention to?

Do we listen to the voice of fear, or the voice of love and how do we distinguish between the two?

What one thing can we do this Lent that assists us to hear the voice of God's love anew, to serve God and love others in God's name?

What one thing can we stop doing that can help us to attend to God's voice?

The season of Lent invites us to draw close to God and renew our trust in God's love as the only one in whom we can trust, that we can rely on God.

'In God alone my soul can find rest and peace, in God my peace and joy. Only in God my soul can find its rest, find its rest and peace.'

*Lections:*

*Deut 26.1-11*

*Psalm 91.1-2, 9-16*

*Luke 4.1-13*