



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Lent 1 2019 11 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent, we rehearse the story of Jesus' forty days and forty nights spent in the Judaeian wilderness and the temptations he faced there.

Mathew, Mark and Luke all tell the story, although each evangelist has a slightly different take on the narrative.

Common to all three accounts, however, are the temptations – all of which directly relate to a struggle over identity and vocation.

You will remember that Jesus has just been baptised by John in the River Jordan and is then 'thrust' by the Spirit into the wilderness. Indeed, the Greek word 'ekballo' is used to underline the force and urgency of this 'flight' into the desert.

Here in the wilderness Jesus wrestles with his identity (an identity which each of the three Evangelists who tell the story of the temptations) have been at pains to make clear in the chapters which precede their telling of the story of the temptations).

Here in the wilderness, in and through a time of testing and trial, Jesus accepts his calling and is formed and shaped by the Spirit for all that will follow: from the calling of the disciples, through his years of ministry in

Galilee, to the final showdown with the gathered forces of darkness and death on Calvary.

Parallels between Jesus' 40 days and nights in the wilderness and the forty wilderness years of the Hebrews are not accidental.

The river Jordan has replaced the Red Sea, and the Judaeen wilderness for the Sinai desert, but the similarities and the inferences the reader must draw from them are laid out very clearly for all to see.

Water, wilderness, hunger, power, identity, calling, formation, the testing of faithfulness, multiple temptations are common and central to both narratives separated by 1600 years.

Throughout scripture, wilderness places are the places where God meets and shapes his people.

Like two boxers squaring up in a ring, Jesus in the red corner and the embodied forces of all that fights against love and light and life in the blue, the protagonists engage.

From the blue corner come offers of self-indulgence, self-aggrandizement and self-serving religious identity, but Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit parries them scripture: proclaiming life to more than food; that God alone is worthy of true worship and service; that the God who is the creator and the sustainer of all that is, is not to be tested or challenged; and that, unlike the people of the Old Covenant, Jesus knows his utter dependence on God and will never rely on self for life, glory, and identity.

Whilst the people of the Old Covenant kept losing their identity in the wilderness, kept denying their God-given identity, Jesus not only holds firm to his, but discovers the richness and fulness of its depths.

Out of their wilderness wanderings, the Hebrews emerged as the people of God's Covenant promise.

From his wilderness wandering, Jesus emerges as God's Covenant promise - both agent and incarnation of salvation.

After his baptism, Jesus entered the wilderness as the Builder Carpenter from Nazareth, but emerged as the Saviour of the World - the Messiah, the New Israel, the Promise and the Promised Land into which all peoples from all places throughout all time would now be invited to settle securely and for all eternity.

Through Jesus' forty days of faithful obedience in the wilderness, the Old Covenant finally gives way to the New and the Gospel, is proclaimed; John the Baptist's work is done and the work of the Church - our work - begins.

Let's go to it!