

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 10th March, 2019

10.30am Morning Worship

led Rev Andrew Robinson, including the Sacrament of
Holy Communion

6.00pm Town Close with Ken Hudson

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

Loving God, we gather penitently in your name to seek renewal – **receive our repentance**. We gather joyfully in your name to worship you – **receive our praise**. We gather full of hope, seeking your help and guidance – **receive our questions**. We gather because we love you and we want to worship you – **receive our commitment**.

May we worship with expectation, openness, receptiveness and sincerity, in the name of Christ. Give us the refuge we need, O loving God, refuge beneath your wings. Protect us from all that we fear, O faithful God, by shielding us from danger. Guard us from temptation, O gracious God, that we may choose the right path. Be with us, and make your presence known, O compassionate God, on every step of life's journey.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Deuteronomy 26 v1-11 First Fruits and Tithes

Psalms 91 v1-2, 9-16 'He is my refuge and my fortress'

Romans 10 v8b-13 Israel's Unbelief

Luke 4 v1-13 The Temptations of Jesus

Growing Through Lent

The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, where he is tested and strengthened for the ministry that lies ahead of him.

This week we explore our attitudes to wealth, power and security, and rethinking our priorities.

With the Promised Land almost in view, Moses looks back over everything that has brought the Israelites to this point. Remembering his ancestors' journey into Egypt, and the horrors of the Israelites' slavery there, he celebrates their amazing rescue by God in words that are an inspiration to suffering people in every generation: 'the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression' (v7).

These verses are recited at every Passover feast, and people of all faiths have much to learn from the Jewish tradition of retelling the story of their salvation. As we look back over our own journey of faith, what were the most significant highs and lows that we experienced? What did we learn about God in those times?

What are our formative experiences? What shapes us and makes us the people we are? How do we grow up with God? As we remember God's goodness to us in the past, so we are strengthened for all that lies ahead.

Moses also explores giving our best to God, bringing the best of the first fruits. What are our first fruits? Do we give God our best? What stops us doing this? Are there too many temptations in the way that prevent us from being the people God wants us to be?

Like Mark and Matthew, Luke explains that it is the Spirit who leads Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism. This is the training camp that will prepare him for his future ministry, and the devil is the sparring partner who will toughen him up for the challenges that lie ahead. In Luke, Jesus has been tempted throughout his 40 days of fasting. These final three temptations represent the greatest tests of all - the temptation to be relevant; the temptation to be popular; the temptation to be powerful.

Hunger isn't the only issue at stake in the first test. One of Luke's main themes is our attitude to material things – food, money, possessions, property – and he has already set out the new world order in Mary's joyful song: 'He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty' (Luke 1v53). Drawing inspiration from the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 8v3), Jesus refuses to let his own hunger distract him. The words of God are what give life, offering far more strength and satisfaction than material possessions.

The second test is about power. Falsely claiming that all the kingdoms of the world are his, the devil invites Jesus to worship him and receive all the glory and authority that come from them. Jesus resists the lie, quoting Deuteronomy 6v13 – the power belongs to God, who is the only one to be worshipped and served. Again, Mary has celebrated the new truth of God's kingdom in which the imbalances of power are corrected: 'He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly' (Luke 1v52). Do we crave power? In the film *'Bruce Almighty'*, God gives Bruce the opportunity to be God for a week. Initially Bruce thinks this is wonderful, and does many selfish acts that better himself. As time goes on, he realises that being God isn't that easy. Bruce cannot cope with the power and the huge responsibility that comes with it. How do we use the power we have? Do we use it selfishly or to better others and society?

The final test is about security. Luke places this last, seeing it as the most significant. Quoting the Scriptures himself (Psalm 91v11-12), the devil urges Jesus to throw himself off the Temple, trusting that God will

rescue him. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6v16 in reply, refusing to test God in such a way. He has not come to save himself, but to give his life for others. How many of our prayers are concerned with our own safety, and the safety of those we love? Can we learn to pray in a more sacrificial way? Yet again, Mary offers a better alternative: 'Let it be with me according to your word' (Luke 1v38).

Sometimes our lives are disrupted: weather, illness, job loss, etc. Jesus intentionally disrupts his life when he enters into the wilderness for 40 days. He is stripped back from everything and is left in the stillness to contemplate and be with his Father. Sometimes disruption to the normal everyday routine is welcome and sometimes it's not. How can we allow our lives to be disrupted positively, so that we can realign our priorities and make space for God?

Temptations are choices. What significant temptations do we face on a daily basis? What might help us to avoid temptations that are unhelpful, bad or wrong? Can temptations be good too? How do we decide what is right? How might our temptations and choices affect other people? Can we help each other in facing up to everyday temptations?

As Jesus showed in the wilderness, the Scriptures provide a tremendous resource for us in times of testing and temptation. They enable us to connect our own experiences with the ongoing story of salvation, reminding us of God's eternal love and faithfulness; and they offer countless examples of men and women refusing to worship the false gods of wealth, power and security, and choosing instead to work for God's vision of a more just and generous world.

A Sending Out Prayer

Challenge us, Lord, in our giving and receiving. Empower us, Lord, when decisions need to be made. Accompany us, Lord, on every step of life's journey, this week, this Lent and always.

Amen.