

1st Sunday in Lent Year A 2014

The advertising world make use of the words sin and temptation, and indulgence, one of my temptations will show in that I remember a chocolate covered ice lolly using that.

Sometimes we also use the words fairly lightly about everyday things, but today we are starkly confronted with the reality of giving in to temptation.

Adam and Eve are living in contact with God, in a lovely place, with nothing apparently to worry about. Out of the abundance that they have there is only one forbidden tree. Satan, in the form of the snake uses this. Adam and Eve are made in God's image and on the surface seem to have everything except the knowledge of good and evil which carries with it death. They made a choice, and we should not forget that when we sin we always have a choice.

Their choice led them to alienation from God, from each other and left a legacy of that for others.

However, also in that garden is the tree of life. This symbolised God's grace. God's grace is an amazing thing, we don't deserve it, we can't earn it, it is freely given. This grace comes into its own in Jesus. Jesus Christ the second Adam, fully obedient to the Father, the source of life who will triumph over death and Satan.

The whole Bible could be described as how God's plan to bring back his rebellious children unfolds, culminating in

his living amongst his people as the Son, the one who was sinless and obedient, in life and in death.

Jesus, in the reading from Matthew's Gospel has just been baptised by John. He has gone into the wilderness to fast, possibly in preparation for his ministry.

The temptations he faces can be translated into ones we face. The first is to doubt God's provision and good will towards us. The temptation is to try to take control, do things for ourselves. Doubting God needs to be replaced by trust in his promises, his power and his love even when he seems to have deserted us.

The second temptation is to try to manipulate God to do what we want. In some ways miracles make sense, demonstrating God's power to people; and Jesus commands us to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, however then we are back to inner motivation. Are we working to God's glory or our own? We have to rely wholly on God, trust him and ask the Holy Spirit to root out any self serving or self glorification.

The third temptation is to seek short cuts to God's goals. Jesus could speedily and easily have presented all the people of the world to Him, except the cost was worshipping the devil. Instead he chose the cost of the cross. In the words of the hymn "God is working his purpose out". Here again we have to trust God and be patient disciples walking and working in the steps of Jesus.

Paul's comparison of Adam and Jesus, in the letter to the Romans, contrasts their respective acts and the

consequences for others. It emphasises the human project begun in Genesis, the Creator's plan has been put back on track, God's saving plan, the redemption of his world. Our sins may not be like Adam's, they are our own, our own choices and actions, they are the discrepancy between who we are and who we were created to be.

We are saved by grace, through faith in Christ. through him we can stand before God justified. 'While we were still sinners' verse 8, God sent Jesus to die for us, not because we were good enough but because he loved us.

To end some words from Leo the Great:

'None of us dear friends, is so perfect and holy as to make reflection and improvement unnecessary. All of us, regardless of rank or dignity, should be concerned to embark on the race that is set before us with fresh determination this Lent, making an effort over and above the norm.

Whatever degree of personal abstinence we observe this Lent, it is vital that all of us should desire above all to feast upon the word of God, entering upon this solemn fast not with a barren abstinence of food which we may impose upon our recalcitrant body or in an attempt to treat the disease of greed, but instead with a spirit of generous self giving.....'

Quoted in "Celebrating the Seasons" Canterbury Press