

Sermon Lent 1 Sunday 9/3/2025

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91; Romans 10: 8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen.

This morning's Gospel paints us a really clear picture of Jesus's time in the desert. He was hungry and isolated. He had placed himself in the desert away from comfort and safety, in a hostile environment, both physically and spiritually. This was intentional – he needed to test himself and his readiness for his mission. Sure enough, he was confronted by temptation when at his lowest ebb and he overcame it.

As a society these days, we tend not to think about the devil, or hell, or evil. That avoidance is to our detriment. Charles Baudelaire said that the greatest trick the devil ever played was to convince us that he did not exist. But be in no doubt - evil is real and it is not stupid. Temptation is tailored to the recipient. Let us look at the way in which temptation confronted Jesus. The devil started with the most basic of human needs – the need for food in the face of great hunger. First, Jesus the man and Jesus the Son of God was tempted, not just to fill his empty stomach, but to misuse his divine power to create food for himself.

Second, Jesus the man and Jesus the Son of God was tempted by the devil to submit to evil in order to become an all-powerful human ruler. This would have bypassed the need for his forthcoming mission of teaching and healing, and death on the cross at the end of his earthly life. It would have seemed like an easy win and immediate mission success. But it would have prevented his resurrection and his willing sacrifice for our redemption. Finally, Jesus the man and Jesus the Son of God was tempted to test God the Father – to force God to

prove his divinity, giving Jesus had no doubt whatsoever about who and what he was.

These are not the temptations most us of Christians will ever have to confront. Instead, each one of us is tempted by things particular to our weaknesses and our desires, and particular to our time and culture. Among the greatest temptations for many of us, are the temptations of avoidance, of passivity and of delay. Yes, we are Christians, but maybe we prefer not to make a song and dance out of our faith; maybe we prefer to sit back and let someone else take action and take the lead; maybe we bargain responding 'yes Lord - but only on my terms'.

That brings me to the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, which is the theme of our Lent 2025 preaching series. The five marks help us to understand and enact in very practical ways the mission of the church, which is the mission of Christ. We are considering each one of the five marks in sequence through the first five Sundays in Lent, but in reality they are interwoven. As Christians, we are called to tell the good news, to teach the faith, to tend one another, to try to to transform injustice, and to treasure God's wonderful creation.

The first mark is TELL - our calling to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. That brings me neatly back to the temptation for many of us that I mentioned earlier – avoidance. Our society is increasingly secular and Christians feel pressured to keep our faith private, to avoid being an embarrassment to ourselves and others by making any mention of our beliefs. That is the exact opposite of telling the good news of the kingdom! We can also be tempted by

passivity. We may look at those with a collar on, those in robes and say – let them tell the good news of the kingdom – it's their job and it will save the rest of us the discomfort. But that is denying our individual calling to tell the good news of the kingdom and instead dumping the responsibility on others. Finally, we can delay it, by saying to God 'yes I will tell the good news, but only if you call me to be a priest or a lay reader'. Thus, we use it as a bargaining chip with which to test God - something Jesus clearly taught us not to do.

And so, to my final point: If we are all called to tell the good news of the kingdom, and we can't all be preachers in the pulpit, how do we enact this core element of our discipleship? Let me share a story with you. A fortnight ago, I attended the funeral of the mother of an old friend. Maura died at the age of 93. She had lived in my hometown almost all her life. She came from a farm, she went away briefly to train as a nurse and then returned home to marry a local farmer. They raised six children.

Maura was a person of devout Christian faith all of her life. She was devoted to prayer and worship. She left one instruction for her funeral – she wanted no fuss and frills, just a simple Eucharist which would speak for itself. She taught and shared her faith with her family and with others in groups in the parish. She was a wonderful tender of other people. As a trained nurse, she was called on by people around the area when someone was dying to sit with them and give comfort at the end. She was often called upon to lay out the bodies of the deceased. She never asked payment – this was simply done as a service for her neighbours. She and her husband were willing members of committees and groups of volunteers working to improve the town, raise money and make the

world a better place for all. As a farmer's daughter and a farmer's wife, she loved the land, the animals and treasured nature.

Maura did not need a pulpit to tell the good news of the kingdom of God. She lived out the mission of Christ in the world day-to-day throughout her long life. She was telling the good news in her love, her kindness, her willing service. As I sat at that funeral, I was struck by how she epitomised Tertullian's words – 'see how these Christians love each other'. Maura simply got on with her ordinary life rooted in her faith, and let the light and love of Christ shine through what she did day-by-day. That is the discipleship we are called to. We do not need a pulpit to tell the good news of the kingdom. We simply need to openly live our faith. Enacted, practical, faithful discipleship is the best way each of us can tell the good news of the kingdom to the world around us.

Let us pray Loving God, you gave us the gift of the five marks of mission as a model to guide our discipleship and to help us enact Christ's mission in the world. We give thanks for the witness of those around us whose lives shine with your love; who, through their actions and their service, proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Help us resist the temptation to avoid your call to share the gospel. Give us the grace to tell of your kingdom through our own lives and in our own words; give the grace to those we meet to receive the good news with open hearts. **Amen**