

Reflection for First Sunday of Lent

By Revd Christina Mason

The gospel reading for today is one of rapid transitions. One moment Jesus is having a transformative spiritual experience and declared the beloved child of God in front of a crowd on the banks of the river Jordan. The next minute, he is being driven out violently into the wilderness, with only Satan and wild beasts for company.

For Jesus, finding himself in the desert alone and bewildered cannot be a sign of God's anger or disappointment with him. His Father has just declared, "*with you I am well pleased*". It seems that the desert is a necessary place of preparation. As Jesus is tempted to grasp at glory, claim power, and embrace self - sufficiency, he is called to respond with faithfulness, endurance, and reliance on the provision of God's angels.

As I was reflecting on this passage and the kind of preparation required of Jesus, I thought back to the few days of silent retreat I spent before ordination as a deacon in the Scottish Episcopal Church and then later as a priest in this diocese. Believe me, it was no desert, and the food at each meal was quite sumptuous. But there was no doubt in my mind that this was indeed a particular sort of preparation. Personally, I found the complete silence difficult, and being quite a sociable sort of person, I longed to be able to speak, and to share thoughts. But in that time, we as ordinands were expected to look inwards and consider the seriousness of the vows we were to be taking in a few days time.

These occasions, although challenging, can indeed be helpful to all of us, not just as preparation for special events, but as part of development as disciples. For the last few weeks I have been suggesting that since we are unable to meet except distanced from each other, the weeks of Lent can be a useful opportunity for quiet reflection and drawing on our memories. I put forward the idea that we could gather some examples of our reflections, in the form of written comments, poems, art or whatever, that might be brought together as our community Lent reflections when we are able to meet again.

This is an opportunity not only to think about our individual faith journeys but also what we want church to be in the future. I have no doubt that the expression of church WILL change in the months and years ahead and rather than passively accepting what might be on offer, I think that it is better to express preferences now, and try to shape what will be right for us in the future, as different parishes and community as a whole.

We do have the time and the space to be reflecting in this way. Rather than doing it on your own, why not chose a discussion partner. I know that many of you are in regular phone contact with each other and at least some of your conversation could be around your “spiritual” journey and your hopes for the church when we are restored to meeting again. Do you notice that I DO NOT use the word “normal”. I am confident that there will be changes, for all of us: some will be welcome, others less so. We all have the capacity to express ourselves and our preferences ----- so, let’s do so. Amen

Christina