

March 2020

Revd John writes:



‘Lent - Lead us not into temptation’

My Auntie Hilda loved chocolate! If she were alive today she would probably be spending the last few days of February enjoying a largish box of Thornton’s Continental Assortment (her favourite chocolates). The very last gold foil wrapped ‘diplomat’ (the one with the delicious almond paste filling) would be eaten slowly and lovingly this year on the evening of February 25th. Then not a hint of chocolate would touch her lips until she opened her Easter egg on Easter morning. Forty days in the chocolate wilderness – a difficult time for a chocoholic. The only problem with this was that Auntie Hilda expected her young nephew to go forty days without chocolate too!!

Of course it doesn’t have to be chocolate – many people give up biscuits, or sugar in their tea, or sweets for Lent. What did Jesus give up for Lent, I wonder? As I read the gospel account of Jesus and his forty days in the wilderness – I am constantly reminded that Jesus’ wilderness experience had little to do with ‘giving up’. Indeed it was a time of intense activity as Jesus, newly anointed at his Baptism, and now armed with the power of God’s Holy Spirit was led into the desert to do battle. The story told by Matthew and Luke in their fourth chapters remind us that Jesus went without food – but fasting is not about giving up – it is about replacing the human requirement of physical food with a spiritual hunger to discern God’s will.

In the wilderness of the desert Jesus faces temptation – the offer of power, glory, and control over the world. He resists them all as his memory keeps bringing to mind the words of God from Scripture.

Time and again Jesus withstands the tempting offers – a remarkable achievement given that he must have been weak, since hunger, tiredness and the painful contrast of burning hot days and freezing cold nights had been his diet for forty days. So for Jesus – Lent was not a time for giving up – but for digging in, for fighting with the last ounce of his strength to combat the wiles of the Devil.

So this Lent – if you need to lose weight, or get fit – by all means do so – go without the chocolate biscuits if that helps. But do something more – spend some time honing your spiritual life. Why not come along to our Lent Study Course ‘God’s Strong Love’.

The devil is still at his work of temptation in the world. The temptations of celebrity, wealth and power and ‘my’ rights are wheeled out daily in our modern society in all kinds of subtle and often seemingly innocent ways. The often hyped freedom to choose our own way – to plan our own destiny – far from bringing freedom seems to further enslave us. We demand to be loved and cared for, yet often are unloving and uncaring as we pursue our selfish aims and neglect the needs of others. Of course we don’t mean to do it, do we? Yet every time we exploit loopholes to reduce our tax bill, or claim benefits we are told we are entitled to, do we really consider the effect of our actions on others? When we buy cheap clothing or other goods, do we consider the plight and poverty of those who make them in the sweat shops of the two-thirds world? When we go about our daily life do we really think about caring for God’s creation and the effect we are having on our planet?

So this Lent – might we use the time to go into training – to explore the wilderness in which we live and to find Jesus and God’s kingdom there – with or without the chocolate!

May we keep a Holy Lent,

Yours in Christ, Reverend John.