

Lent 2 Sermon

Theme: *It's better to give than to receive... and costly to self*

In this period of Lent we remember Jesus' 40 days in the Judean Wilderness; we reflect upon his experience and seek to share in something of his experience as we walk with him.

The irregular rugged jaggy landscape provides a test for every step you take; the driest dry heat scotches the rocks, scorches your exposed flesh, and you can see the shimmering heat rising before your eyes. As you strain your eyes to see through the shimmering mirage and heat the shadows move. At times you really wonder if you are alone.

At times the sound of silence is painful in this place, not a sound... you strain your ears to hear anything but... nothing. Occasionally something you can hear is the sound of subtle scurrying, possibly slithering, but there's nothing to see except shadows. The wind through the Desert tree whistles and almost sounds like whispering: again you wonder if you are alone. This Judean Wilderness is a testing and trying place. The salt on your lips serves to makes you even more thirsty but this is desert and if you want water you'll have to find some.

"Lord you are my Shepherd, you have led me to this place, to this strange and lonely place... will you meet me here, won't you? I will hear you in this place won't I? Where are you? He lifts his eyes to the surrounding hills wondering from where God would come? Would God come like wind or fire from the Jerusalem hills to the right or from the Jordan Hills to his left?

A meditation in the Wilderness... *Eternally the Father has given to the Son; eternally the Father has given himself to the Son and has held nothing back. From forever and forever the Father has only ever given and given and given to the Son. The Father pours his own breath, his own Spirit, his own life in and through the Son. The Son responds in giving himself to the Father. God in Trinity is a community of giving and giving and giving.*
Jesus reflects upon the overflowing generous self-giving of God. I praise you Father...

In his ministry Jesus would not only teach, but would share the generosity of God. He would reveal how it is better to give than to receive: he knew this truth better than any other. "God is giving", Jesus reflects... God is generous... and holds nothing back. What kind of generosity is this? How can that be revealed? This would be the kind of generous giving that Jesus would delight to exhibit in his ministry. "Father God, I will reveal you in giving. I will give as you have given. Freely freely I have received, freely freely I will give."

Jesus had been tempted to think of himself, to think of his own comfort, to think of his own wealth and pride. But he rejects this distraction or temptation as not being the way of God. The way of God was never self-seeking, self-focused or even self-preserving. The Father lived to give, and always gave himself... totally.

What would surprise everyone was that God was the generous giver who gave life *to all*. Every breath was God's gift and every heartbeat was Gods gift. God gives life to all. Jesus wondered how he could make this clear – perhaps by going to all and excluding none. The religious leaders were mean with God's gifts and graces and blessing – they kept such things of God safe, but this was not God's way. Jesus would reveal God's lavish

generosity on all and go to all with the Father's blessings. He would offer everything the Father had given him *to all* – including the unclean and the outcasts, including the Romans and the Samaritans, including the nation's foes and their faith's enemies.

The Kingdom of God was closer than these people could imagine though obscured by God's own people. God's love was all around but eclipsed by the religious regulations, rituals and laws. God's compassion was here for all but only being offered to a few. Jesus would reveal the abundant generosity, love and mercy of God *for all*... and he would give it away in the manner that God gave.

You have the wrong idea of God Jesus said, if you think that the Father wants you to protect the gifts and graces and blessings you have received from him! They were not for you to keep... they were for you to give away! If you wonder who you should give them to, why not give them away to the next person you meet?

“What if that's a Roman occupier of our land?

What if it is a despised Samaritan?

What if it's a leper or a tax-collector or a faith outcast?”

With such questions, Jesus' face lights up, “Yes,” he says, “especially to them!” And Jesus says, “yes!” to himself... “Yes, Father... especially to them!”

And there were times in Jesus ministry when the religious authorities, his disciples and even his own family thought that he might have “flipped”. There were times when they all thought he had gone too far or was perhaps losing the plot!

In response to Jesus' teachings his followers would make corrections, tighten things up, offer more control and regulation over all grace. They would revert to the safer practice of keeping God in the church where God was appreciated, where God would be revered, and where God could be kept safe. But God does not want to be kept safe, God wants to be in the alley bringing light, among the hungry offering food, with the outcast making them feel welcome, holding the hand of the Ebola victim and risking infection. God puts himself on the line every day for the sake of others, and not even for those who are worth it but most especially for those who are not worth it (to God they are with it).

If Jesus continues to reveal God in this kind of way he will ultimately give himself away and he will die... or he will be killed. The religious authorities are rigid about how they see and understand God and new revelation is not what they seek. They had their religious traditions and they didn't want them altered. How strange that the greatest opponents to God's love and mercy, grace and forgiveness would be his own people! We have our enemies and we don't want to see Jesus talking with them, sharing with them, eating with them *and certainly not blessing them*. Jesus comes offering God's blessings left, right and centre, he doesn't seem to care whom he blesses: some are not of our culture, tradition, or even of our faith, in fact some are quite clearly those whom God wants us to distance ourselves from such as lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes. He does want us to distance ourselves from the likes of them doesn't he?

Jesus feels the desert wind on his face – the same wind that everyone feels and he laughs thinking about God's generous Spirit blowing upon all. “You, Father, are more generous, more giving and forgiving, more loving and merciful *to all* than anyone can ever imagine. I will reveal your love Father, *to all*, without favour, restraint or hesitation. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”