

## LENT 1:

Lent is (or can be) a challenging time. It can be a wilderness journey of reflection... soul searching... and God experiencing. So we begin our Lenten Journey

Lent is about honesty in our reflection on life, and faith; in addressing our doubts and fears; about entering into prayerfulness and God seeking; and it's about questioning and renewal.

*When was the last time your faith took a major turn or change or you experienced some great new revelation?*

Lent can be a walk with the disciples; with them we observe and listen to Jesus. At the same time this can be a walk with Jesus; with him we share in his temptations, doubts and fears, and we share in his hopes and prayers. This will be a faith journey and we wonder if our faith will sustain us.

During Lent we follow Jesus into the wilderness for some soul searching, we ask some big questions of God, we ask some big questions of ourselves, we reconsider life and the meaning of life, and the meaning of *my life*.

In the wilderness what is important will come sharply into focus and what is insignificant will scurry away.

In the wilderness we will face some uncomfortable truths: perhaps about ourselves; we will face some scary truths – perhaps about our faith; we will face some new challenges – that may upset us and test us to the limit.

What new things will God say? Are we like those of old who prayed: “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more” (Deut. 18:16).

**Prayer...** *Loving God, you love without condition... your love has no limits... and your love is boundless. We often prefer to love more carefully. Through your Son you lead us to new heights and depths in love for you lead us in your way. Help us to follow you this Lent, to journey with you, to face our fears and temptations and to hear your call for us today. Your Son's teaching is hard... help us to listen. Your Son's leads us forward but we want to go back. Lord you are my Shepherd, help me to follow where you lead.” Amen.*

Two people to read: [Matthew 4:1-11](#) & [Psalm 119:105](#)

We begin by reflecting upon the wisdom of the Word. God's word to those in the past was declared to be "a light for our path" (Psalm 119:105). Some may say that the same is true for them today.

**Question:**

What do we mean when we say, "a light for my path"? Can you think of an example, *i.e.*, a real life situation? This may not come to you immediately but take a moment to think back, or perhaps you have a situation from this week?

The LORD has been the guide of His people Israel. This was their great confession.

The great occasions that the Jews might remember where the Lord was experienced as their Shepherd... Yahweh with the patriarchs... with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the descent to Egypt and most especially with Moses in the return. Also, during the times of invasion, deportation, return and restoration.

This happened to other nations (every other nation?) but the Jews believed the Lord was their Shepherd.

Jesus seeks to know the Lord as his Shepherd... in the wilderness. Ponder this.

How might the Lord have led him thus far to his baptism and to the wilderness?

Is the Lord with him now in the wilderness? Is he sure among his temptations and doubts – are we sure when in our wilderness, temptations and doubts?

Did the LORD lead me to this wilderness? Is Yahweh with me? Where are you?

**Read aloud Ps 23.**

Might Jesus remember these:

**Hosea 6:8:** He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

**Jeremiah 1:5:** "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

**Most of the Psalms** echo what we often experience.

Think on the many Old Testament stories which were the basis of Jesus' faith tradition: the Genesis Creation Story; Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Joseph; Moses: deliverance and the Exodus and 10 Commandments; Samson; Daniel; Jonah; the Judges; the Prophets. These are precious faith stories to every Jew. Remember when you learnt them.

These Old Testament faith stories would be the shadow of what was to come, these were the 'foretaste'. Our focus is not these stories but **Jesus: Listen to him.**

Meditating on the Old Testament seems to be easier than meditating upon the Gospel of Jesus for many – why? Isn't *love's way* so much harder than *law*?

From the time of Jesus... from the time when Jesus said, "you have heard it said, but now I say unto you..." his teaching was hard to accept - it seems to be just as hard now.

Jesus pronounced the most incredible forgiveness... "forgiveness unconditional" yet we try to condition it.

**Mark 2:** And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' <sup>6</sup>Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup>'Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' **BLASPHEMY!**

**James 5:** Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. **BLASPHEMY!**

**BLASPHEMY TO THE JEWS... AND BLASPHEMY TO THE CHRISTIANS.**

In the wilderness Jesus considers the Father's great love, the Father's grace, the Father's kind of forgiveness and wonders how he will teach it, share it, convey it?

Dare we have a Wilderness experience where we question and doubt and wonder?

Dare we grow in grace... that is in generous undeserved giving, growing in giving undeservedly to others... at cost to self?

The church is NOT famous for being forgiving, gracious, loving, broad, & unconditional...

Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Are churches non-judgmental?

Do we really welcome people as they are or want them to change first... or hope that we can change them in time? "Come as you are so we can change you?" Is that non-judgmental?

Jesus said, "Judge not lest you be judged." Who might we include that would be shocking to the '*religious authorities*'? Who might we sit with or eat with today that would shock the religious authorities? Who would Jesus include today that we would not, and his behaviour would shock us?

Jesus said, "You have heard it said... now I say unto you." What new thing is Jesus teaching today regarding mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the use of modern technology? What new thing is Jesus teaching today regarding our church and new ways to be the church? Yes these are BIG questions.

*Lord Jesus... are you asking me to take on a new default position? Can God ask this of you?*

**Prayer:** (to be said slowly) Loving God, your Son outshines all our past traditions, yet still we treasure them and often want to return to them – they are always easier to us than following him. Loving God, your Son leads us to fresh water each day, he offers us fresh bread each day, and he offers new us opportunities each day... help us to face the challenges of our day and to reveal your love and grace as freely as we have received.

Together we say **the grace**... 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ... the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. AMEN