

Temptation

A Sermon preached by Janet Bird at Sele Farm on 18th February 2018

Temptation is a word which most of us can relate to at some time or other and we may not always be able to resist it. The writer Oscar Wilde wrote “ *I can resist anything except temptation*” and perhaps as Lent progresses and if we have decided to give up various pleasures (Chocolate, biscuits, alcohol perhaps) we may be beginning to find that we agree with him as we have just the odd chocolate or glass of wine. We may think of these as small temptations because they don't really hurt anybody else, but are we fooling ourselves?

Sometimes we may be tempted to do things that may ultimately cause harm to our self or to someone else.

We may be tempted to take a risk such as breaking the speed limit when we are in a hurry or crossing the road when there is a car coming.

We may be tempted to avoid paying tax or to lie about something we have done or something we have failed to do.

The risks of giving in to temptation may sometimes seem to be worth taking – until something goes badly wrong and somebody gets hurt or you are brought to account.

Temptation may occur suddenly or it may gnaw away at us over a period of time. The best way of dealing with temptation is to be prepared for it to strike at any time.

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus was sent out into the wilderness the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan for 40 days. In Mark's gospel, we are simply told that “He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”

In Matthew's Gospel, we are given more details of how Satan tested Him by trying to encourage Him to prove that he was the Son of God. First by turning stones into bread

so that he could eat when he was starving , then by jumping from the top of the Temple and trusting that the angels would save him and finally by taking complete power over the whole world in exchange for falling on his knees and worshipping Satan.

However Jesus was able to resist whatever temptations Satan came up with because he was fully prepared. Just before He went into the wilderness Jesus had been baptised by John the Baptist and the Spirit of God had come down upon Him like a dove as God's words came from Heaven saying “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*”

So when Jesus went into the wilderness He knew that God loved Him and would protect Him and give Him the strength to not give in to temptation. Being tempted isn't the sin. Putting ourselves in the way of temptation may not be very wise but it is by giving into temptation that we commit the sin.

Children will often do things which are inherently dangerous or unkind not because they have been tempted but because they have not yet had enough experience to know how to behave. Knowing that they are loved and being taught well enables them to make their mistakes in a safe environment and to learn the difference between right and wrong, so that they are, in time, able to deal with temptation wisely.

Just as we prepare those we love and God prepared Jesus so God prepares each of us. Because God loves us he encourages us not to put ourselves in the way of temptation, but if it strikes He can give us the strength to resist it.

Similarly as children of a loving God we need to follow the example of God's own Son and show love and kindness to others rather than putting temptation into their way so that we are not encouraging them to sin.

