

**ST. ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY 10 MARCH 2019 at 10.45am**  
**First Sunday in Lent**

**Sermon: Tackling Temptation**

**Temptations in the Desert**

Led by the Spirit into the wilderness ..... on retreat! Thinking through how to fulfil his vocation. Fasting and prayer essential part of this preparation. Methodist ordinands have several days on retreat prior to their ordination.

IF you are the Son of God – the world's your oyster!

**Stones into Bread** : wilderness experience. Stony desert – stones like breadcakes.

Attend to people's material needs and they'll follow you.

Quotes from Deuteronomy 8 v. 3 "The Lord humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." NB after feeding of 5,000 they wanted to make Jesus king! He slipped away.

*Malcolm Guite: Stones into bread*

**High mountain with panoramic view of the kingdoms of this world :**

probably overlooking the Rift valley with the Dead Sea within it. Note importance of mountains as places where God reveals himself and his will for us ... Moses, Elijah. Temptation to **compromise** with worldly values. William Barclay puts it like this in his commentary on Luke "The devil said "I've got people in my grip. Don't set your standards so high. Strike a bargain with me. Just compromise a little with evil and men will follow you." Quotes from Deuteronomy 6 v. 13 "The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve." and Deuteronomy 10 v. 20 "You shall fear the Lord your God: him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast...."

*Malcolm Guite: All the kingdoms of the world*

**Parapet of the temple – signs and wonders:**

There was a sheer drop of 450ft from the point where Solomon's porch met the Royal porch down to the Kidron valley below. Temptation to be **sensational – a nine days' wonder**. He can justify this from Scripture. The devil cites Scripture to his purpose - Psalm 91 v. 11 "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. ....and v. 14 "Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name."

But Jesus recognises that this would be deliberately putting God to the test and so he refutes one piece of Scripture with another quoting Deuteronomy 6 v. 16 "Do not put your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah". See Exodus 17 v. 1-7. Massah was the name Moses gave to Rephidim, the place in the wilderness where there was no water and the people railed against Moses for bringing them out of Egypt to die of thirst in the desert. They had lost trust that God was with them and that they could rely on him. Moses cried out to the Lord " What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" Moses was instructed by God to strike the rock at Horeb (holy mountain). He did so and

water flowed out so the people could drink and quench their thirst.

God promises his help and support: we are not to abuse it by using unusual or sensational methods to get public attention expecting God to bail us out. Or as a modern paraphrase puts it "You mustn't push God too far." Jesus as the Son of God must learn to quietly rely on his loving relationship with his heavenly Father and let God's love emanate to all he meets. However difficult things get, he is to trust in God's saving presence.

*Malcolm Guite: Pinnacle of the temple*

Jesus emerges from this time on retreat with a deepened trust in God in which there is no room for personal gratification and aggrandisement. On the contrary, he will embrace humility, mercy and justice.

Lent is a time when we can "go on retreat" – quiet days; making more time for prayer and reflection; self-discipline such as fasting. But above all renewing our commitment to embracing humility, mercy and justice in a deepening relationship with God.

The devil "departed from him for a season" or "departed from him until an opportune time" or "left him, biding his time." Ominous. Need to be aware of temptations to court popularity; to be too pre-occupied with material things; to use less than honest and open dealings to achieve our goals.

Don't put yourself to the test unnecessarily. It will happen often enough anyway!

Quote from Hebrews 4 v. 15 about Jesus as our great high priest "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Jenny Carpenter