

Welcome to this reflection for the first Sunday of Lent.

These short addresses will follow the Church in Wales readings for our Sundays through the season. Today, the readings are Genesis chapter 9, verses 8 to 17. And St. Mark's gospel, the first chapter, verses 9 to 15.

We're also going to follow the theme of endurance, what it is to have an enduring faith, and today, how to endure a time of trial, a time of temptation. Both of those readings which are set for this first week of Lent, and are really about a description of trauma, a trial to be endured.

The first one, in Genesis, is a conversation which God has with Noah and his family, after the great flood is over. You'll remember that it was a worldwide and ecological crisis, a little like what we sometimes see on our news bulletins after a huge storm or a tsunami, waters overwhelming the whole of the region where Noah lived. And as they recovered from that trauma, God promised to him and his family that they would have a future, that God would care for them, that his covenant love would be with them. He promised them his goodness. And he promised that the sign of that care would be a rainbow. Now we're very familiar with the fact that we use the rainbow as a sign of good things in our life, a sign of hope. We use it as a sign of LGBT life. Last year, we particularly used it to express our gratitude to the NHS workers who are doing outstanding work, saving lives and caring for people, some of them in extremis. A rainbow is a sign of hope, a sign of care. And that trauma in Genesis is very much about a trial that affected the whole known world. Whereas we have a rather different trauma in Mark's gospel.

In Mark chapter 1, Jesus has been baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan. And he then heads out into the wilderness. It's the kind of trial faced by an individual who's on a path, a tough personal road. It's an inner trial. Jesus has taken himself into a solitary place, there are no creature comforts, there are no distractions. There's no company to give him another opinion. He's just on his own. And he's exploring there his own sense of purpose and motivation. What is his life about? Not an unusual question for a human soul to ask. And Mark gives us no details about that time of temptation. He just says that Jesus was 'tempted by Satan'.

So here are two readings with different kinds of trial. A flood, which was a threat to the known world, to human society and every living creature, but where the outcome was the declaration that God is good. And Jesus's time in the wilderness, also a time of testing, a time for him to discover that God is going to be faithful to him, and the things of Satan need to be resisted.

Do you know, I've never particularly liked the translation of the Lord's Prayer, which speaks of saving us from the time of trial. I much prefer the more traditional "lead us not into temptation". But I suppose that more contemporary phrase "save us from the time of trial" recognises that we are all subject to trials, to traumas, to times of stress and anguish, of anxiety born sometimes of uncertainty. And we all approach Lent this year, knowing that lockdown has indeed been a time of trial for us: families all trying to operate in the same space together, home-schooling making life difficult, we've been cut off from those who we need to care for and want to see. And just the daily toil of having to do everything from home, I know has threatened some people's wellbeing. And now here we are also having to journey through Lent at home again.

So what are our temptations through which we have to endure? What have we been facing, and what will occupy your minds during the season of Lent, to be 'tempted by Satan'? It's just the same for us as it was for Jesus in his wilderness experience. Essentially, the temptation is to want something more than God, to lose our sense that God is good. And that eventually, if we lose our

hope in him, that leads us to despair, to lose a sense that faith matters to us. That was the temptation that Jesus had to confront.

Now, maybe lockdown has made us think more about the things we really desire, an easy life, perhaps a little more money, more power, more control over our circumstances, more popularity. But none of these things will satisfy us and give us inner peace and purpose. None of them will equip us to endure, none of them in the end are more important than our loyalty to God and what he asks of us. We need to know that promise, which God made, to know that he is good to us, and he calls us by our name, that he will not let us go in the time of trial. It is very tempting to put all of these things we desire, as more important in our life, than our reliance on God. From that deep, abiding sense of God's covenant love, also flows our character. If we live knowing God as good, then we also build our own capacity for good, living by love and peace and joy. And that too, will help us to endure through our times of trial.

Remember how in the midst of our lockdown experience, Captain Tom Moore became such an inspiration to us. An elderly man coming towards the end of his life, when he'd known war and personal disappointments, but yet who set himself the challenge to do his bit for the NHS to improve its lot. But what was it that inspired us so much about Captain Tom, more than any other fundraiser or good cause? It wasn't so much the amount he raised as his character in the face of adversity. He knew that there were parts of the end of his life that he would never get back and yet he remained kind and courteous, and positive, determined to tell people when they asked that 'tomorrow would be a good day'. He lived by love, peace and joy, by the character that we call good.

So as we step into the first full week of Lent, I encourage you to allow yourself to recognise that times of trial come to all of us, trauma can be very real to us. In the midst of them, our God is good. And we hold tight to our trust in that goodness. We live by what is good, asking ourselves, where can we do more good?

I hope to finish each of these Lent reflections with the example of somebody who has endured in their faith, and particularly to look at how they've done it. And my choice this week is Barack Obama. I'm reading his book about what it was to be the first person of colour to hold the Office of President of the United States. 'A Promised Land'. In that book he tells us the story of the day of his Inauguration. As he waited to step forward to take the oath of office, he prayed a prayer which he then repeated every night whilst he was President. It was a prayer of thanksgiving for all that he'd been given. It was a prayer that his sins may be forgiven. A prayer for his family and the American people to be kept safe from harm, and a prayer for guidance.

Now, that habit of daily prayer will also sustain us if we have to endure and especially it will help us when we know we desire things that are incompatible with our love for God. Most of all, it will keep us close to a sense of the goodness of God every day of our life. I commend to you the habit of daily prayer.