

## **Sermon – Lent 1**

### **Luke 4: 1-15**

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Amen.

It's great to be back with you again, after three weeks on leave, to bring you the first of our Lenten sermons. After our joyous Pancake Night on Tuesday, we entered this holy period on Ash Wednesday. The Gospel reading on Wednesday, from Matthew chapter 6, gives us a hint about what the season of Lent means. Here Jesus talks about being charitable, giving alms and not storing up our treasures here on earth. He talks about praying and introduces the Lord's prayer. He talks about fasting, keeping everything in moderation and not being excessive in our habits, which often is all too easy to fall into. Lent is a season of thoughtfulness, of intention; a season to prepare our hearts, minds and bodies for the joyous Easter morning of Christ's resurrection, which offers us new life, and the chance of a more complete relationship with God.

Our Gospel reading today, on this first Sunday in Lent, is a great reminder of our all too human nature. It provides us with three great pointers to our human character and also some great truths about our faith. It also showcases Jesus' strength and wisdom in the most severe of circumstances. Let's reflect on our humanness and the Lenten journey that we all now begin. The reading today is the well known story of Jesus going out into the wilderness for 40 days where he was tempted by the devil. It sets some context to Lent and our own 40 day Lenten journey. Unlike Jesus, who avoided the devil's traps, we often fall into the pitfalls of being distracted by the material things of our world, of having multiple Gods, or putting our God to the test and bargaining with him. Lent gives us an opportunity to refocus our faith and the important things in our life journey. So let's have a closer look at the reading.

Jesus has been fasting in the desert for 40 days and is now famished. The devil comes to him saying, you must be hungry, show your power and turn

one of these rocks into bread. But Jesus is not going to be sucked into power games. His response is that **"One does not live by bread alone."**

How often do we as humans get distracted by material things? Perhaps we love clothes, or food, or our possessions. But this isn't what makes us, is it? Our identity is more complex, more subtle, than what we have or the way we present. We are people with feelings, we are social people. We need more than bread to lead a happy fulfilled life.

During our holidays, Leon and I walked the Aussie Camino, a trail from Portland in the south of Victoria to Penola in rural South Australia. The walk celebrates Australia's first and only, so far, saint, Mary Mackillop who founded the Josephite sisters, a catholic missionary order of nuns who focused on bringing education to the poorest parts of society. Why do people walk caminos? In our case, it was a walk of 150kms over 7 days. I can tell you that at the end of the walk my feet and joints were aching around the clock. But would I do it again? Yes, indeed, and we are even dreaming of our next camino, perhaps next year. The concept of camino, a journey with Christ, is very relevant to our Lenten journey. It requires focus and discipline to keep putting one foot in front of the other for 20+ kilometers, day after day. But also as one travels along the beautiful countryside, the garden of God's creation, it's possible to feel Jesus walking with us, beside us, or even within us. When we strip back the business of life, the cares and worries of our existence, and intentionally move ourselves towards Jesus, his presence can be felt and experienced. And I think that this is what we try to do in Lent, we try to get closer to Jesus because we do not exist on bread alone. As humans, we have greater needs than just ensuring that our bodies are fed. We have a longing for relationship, with ourselves, with each other, with God and with creation.

Well getting back to our Gospel! The first test doesn't work, so the devil ups the ante. He shows Jesus the whole world and says that if Jesus worships him, he can have it all. But again Jesus says **"Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."** How often do we fall into the trap of worshipping other Gods? Perhaps it is the God of celebrity, or the God of wealth, or perhaps it's the God of self pity. But Jesus says there is only one God and we are to

serve him. Happiness and completeness, that doesn't come from bread alone, comes from serving our Lord and loving others as God loves us.

I'm not sure about you, but I know for myself, that I am most happy, most content and most fulfilled, when I am focusing on my ministry and serving God in this place. Seeing the fruits of our love of God and neighbour is for me such a blessing. Like our Pancake night last Tuesday. How good was it to share good food and fellowship with our community here in Little River? I noticed quite a few new faces, people who don't come to church. My prayer is that during this season of Lent, perhaps they will be inspired by the Holy Spirit to try out our worship and come to see God's love shown through us on a Sunday afternoon.

When do you feel far from God? Have you noticed that this often happens when we take our attention off our gracious God and perhaps replace God with another, perhaps the God of sport, (we're about to enter another footy season), or perhaps the God of self-obsession, when we get caught up in our own anxieties and worries and don't give our cares to our merciful God who understands all and cares for all. As many of you know, last year I had a run of ill health for five months and got caught in this undesirable space of not trusting God. Thank God though, that I was able to return to the Lord my God during our Camino when the only thing to be concerned about was literally putting one foot in front of the other. I've returned fully focused on my ministry here in Lara and Little River.

And finally, the devil takes Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem and dares him to throw himself off the temple wall and see if God will save him. And Jesus says **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."** Did you notice how the devil quotes the psalm we read today?

"He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and  
"On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

How often have we fallen into that trap of testing or bargaining with God? Or even using scripture for our own means not for God's purposes? Have you

ever really wanted something so badly that you have bargained with God in an effort to obtain that which you desire? Perhaps we all have....

But Jesus, gets through all these tests. He remains that one true template of how we should live as human beings: full of love and compassion, certain and confident in our faith and living a life of service to others. At the end of our reading today, Jesus returns to the Galilee filled with the Holy Spirit and start his ministry.

So how will you make this Lenten journey? Will you give something up, and take a fast in the desert? Will you take something on? Or will you have both a fast and a feast. A fast of the things that can hold you back from a deeper relationship with God and a feast of time spent with him.

We have a number of offerings to support you in your Lenten journey. It's not too late to join the Ripple program on Thursday afternoons or the Being With program on Saturday afternoons. We also have an extra Zoom Prayer service on Wednesday evenings if you would like to join us in praying for our world which surely is in a sorry state at the moment. Or you might like to try our quiet mid-week service at Holy Trinity on a Wednesday morning. What ever you choose, I do hope and pray that you find a way to deepen your relationship with Jesus this Lent.

May the Lord bless you and hold you, and deepen your faith within you.  
Amen.