

Sunday 5 March, 2017 – 8am service

*A sermon preached by the Revd Canon Dr Stephen Ames, on the First Sunday in Lent*

**Readings: Genesis 2:15-17,3:1-7; Psalm 32, Romans 5:12-21; Matthew 4:1-11**

This story of Jesus being tempted by the devil has two backgrounds which we need to keep in mind. One is that scene in Deuteronomy where the Israelites are about to cross the Jordan and enter the promised-land and Moses is repeating all the teaching from God and how they have not listened to God these forty years and what will happen to them in the land of milk and honey if they continue not to listen.

The other background is Adam and Eve in the garden. They are placed there with a vocation to till and keep it, they are given to each other for it is not good to be alone; they are given permission to freely enjoy the fruit of the garden and a prohibition not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their relationship with God turns on God speaking and their listening. Only they do not listen.

So, Adam and Eve do not listen to God. Israel does not listen to God. Jesus listens. And what does he hear? At his baptism, he hears his Father saying to him, 'You are my Son, my beloved, in you is all my delight'. Jesus lives from this speaking and hearing.

There are always other voices. In the garden there is the serpent, for Eve there is also her own voice reflecting on the fruit, while Adam simply follows her. In Israel there were the idols and the false prophets, and for Jesus there was the devil who later spoke through Peter and through the opposition to Jesus.

So, Adam and Eve do not listen to God, Israel does not listen to God. There are always other voices. To whom do we listen? To whom does Donald Trump listen? To whom does Malcolm Turnbull listen? To whom does Archbishop Freier listen? To whom does Dean Andreas listen? To whom does your preacher listen? To whom do you listen? The answer to all these questions is the same. By their fruits you will know them. There are always other voices. And we can tell from the state the world is in, that the other voices are prevailing – for the moment, but not forever!

Jesus listens. He listens to and follows his Father. He hears and rejects these other voices which the devil brings together in tempting Jesus to renounce his true identity as the beloved Son of God; firstly, by proving it through turning stones into bread, secondly, through testing God's care for the Messiah by throwing himself off the temple, and thirdly, by seeking authority and power in exchange for worshipping the devil rather than his Father.

These are the voices enticing human beings to live another life apart from God, where we worship the mighty dollar; where we worship the power that comes from the barrel of the gun; where we prefer alternative facts, post-truth and plausible deniability, as cover ups more robust than fig leaves, to avoid exposure and perhaps the shame of being held accountable, whether it is the church covering up abuse, or the elites who illegally shipped

those young British kids to seed the empire in Australia and other 'colonies', or treating the effects of our actions as external to us, so that they are someone else's problem – like the rubbish that covers the sea bed under Port Philip Bay and the plastic that covers the great swathes of oceans, or like all the rubbish left on the cathedral lawns. Or, dare I say, like the homeless people on the streets of Melbourne.

And of course, there is the market which makes possible the fantasy of living on bread alone, especially if you believe your house prices will keep rising along with your personal debt. The market is full of voices telling us to buy, and always innovating new things for us to consume – including new identities – why just the other day I saw an Ad for a car with the slogan, "You can drive your identity" Like all other commodities, it is a throw away. We are invited to become like trash. What then will it mean to be true to yourself?

These are not the only things about which we should take care. I was telling my students in the first lecture at the university this week about two different voices with two different images of God.

*"In 1630s, when the Massachusetts Bay Colony condemned and exiled Anne Hutchison for teaching a too radical doctrine of grace (and for, as a woman, teaching at all) Thomas Hooker, one of the organisers of the campaign against her, insisted that her picture of God's unpredictable and excessive grace was too dangerous to the social order. 'I know there is wild love and joy enough in the world as there is wild thyme and other herbs, but we would have garden love and garden joy of God's own planting.'"*

Thomas Hooker had a completely domesticated God. Ann Hutchison knew of God as radical, excessive grace. Surely it is the latter that enters the world as a baby, ending up as a man nailed to a cross, but then raised from the dead.

The folk at the Massachusetts Bay Colony wanted only to listen to a domesticated God. Might that be why you are here today? I hope not.

Jesus listens. He listens to and follows his Father. He hears all these other voices which the devil brings together in tempting him to renounce his true identity as the beloved Son of God. This is the deep temptation. Jesus rejects those voices and lives out this identity even in the midst of the growing opposition leading to his crucifixion.

We know from the story in that other garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was utterly aware of the cup he was about to drink and how deeply he wanted the Father to remove it. Yet his identity as the beloved Son is shown in the yet deeper desire to do his Father's will and drink the cup. Luke says the Jesus sweated blood in that garden! This offers us an example on which we can meditate to help us awaken to a sense of a deeper identity within us as created in the image of God and baptised into the Body of Christ.

You remember from Mark chapter 7, Jesus was criticised because his disciples returned from the market place without washing their hands. Jesus' response is to say it is not what goes into a man or a woman that defiles them, but rather what comes out of their hearts that all kinds of evil come out. Now a detail in the text worth noticing is that in Mark 7:21,

the Greek has Jesus saying it is out of the “dialogues” of the heart that evil intentions are enacted.

We are all familiar with the dialogues of the heart, those ramblings, those rantings, those ruminations of our hearts to which we listen and which inform how we interact with those we are ruminating about or if intense enough, even overflowing into whatever other situation we are in.

It would be very good to be able to hear the dialogues of our heart but with a bit of distance from them. So we don't become infused with them, and act on them. These days this is called mindfulness. It is being introduced to young people at school. In a period of silence in a class room, they learn to notice their thoughts and choose not to be carried along by them even as they listen to themselves. When this becomes a regular, even daily practice in a school, research shows the students experience the benefit in themselves and between themselves, and in their studies.

Discovering the place in yourself from which to notice your flittering thoughts is one way into your deeper identity from which you can choose what to do instead of acting out those dialogues of your heart.

Now this place will become an icon of God within you. It is like an icon on the desktop of your computer screen. Click on it and it opens to give access to new levels of operation. You click on the icon of God within you by finding the place from which to be attentive to the dialogues of your heart. It opens to reveal more to you than you were aware. This leads to an awareness of God for anyone.

But there is something more for you who are baptised into Christ. At your baptism the Spirit unites you to Christ so that you may evermore dwell in him and he in you. As you continue to attend to the icon of God within you, you will begin to find that the dialogue between Jesus and his Father begins to infuse your heart. New movements of your heart awaken within you and you may choose to follow them. This is the gift of being baptised into Christ by the power of the Spirit. This is the saving benefit to us of Jesus remaining faithful. If you choose to follow these movements of the heart, you may contribute to that *wilde love and joy in the world, just as there is wild thyme and other herbs*. God knows, we all need that kind of love. The whole world needs the voices of those who carry that love.