

## You are enough

A sermon prepared by Tori Venmore-Rowland for the First Sunday in Lent, 17 February 2021

Refs: Genesis 9. 8-17; 1 Peter 3. 18-end; Mark 1.9-15

When I am writing a sermon, I try to picture you, the people who will hear it, and I ask God - what do you most need to hear this morning? What do you need to hear as we go into Lent, the traditional time for prayer and fasting on the way towards Easter.

What have we heard already? Our Gospel reading tells us of the Baptism of Jesus. Other Gospels tell us that John isn't keen to baptise him, he tries to argue about it, but Jesus insists. As he comes up out of the water a voice booms out "*This is my Son.*" In case anyone was confused, the spirit, 'like a dove' descends upon Jesus. God continues: "*This is my son, the beloved. In you I am well pleased.*"

After his Baptism Jesus is driven out into the wilderness to be tested for forty long days. Lent for us is a time of testing, of wilderness, and yet, what can we do? Right now it already feels like we have given up so much! Do we need to abstain from something more to feel beloved of God? The Bible says we are already God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

God says to us, "You are beloved. In you God is well pleased."

Going back to our reading, Jesus is baptised. And as he's coming up out of the water the spirit of God descends in the form of a dove. Now if you remember back to Genesis and Noah's Ark, Noah sends out the birds to find out if the land is dry. The first ones come back bearing nothing, but the dove comes back with an olive branch in its beak.

The dove links back to Genesis in a nice echo. Things come round in circles in the bible quite often. The dove announced to Noah that there was dry land – deliverance from the flood – and here the Holy Spirit reveals deliverance from sins. Or as Theophylact of Ochrid, one of the church fathers, eloquently puts it: "*There, the twig of olive; here the mercy of God.*"

And God says to us you are beloved. In you God is well pleased.

And then Jesus is sent out into the wilderness. Once again this links back to Genesis and the story of the Ark. He is sent out for forty days and forty nights, which if you remember, is the same length of time that it rained for, upon Noah's Ark. Forty is another kind of biblical motif that keeps repeating itself. It's used as a number to represent testing, and hardship. But it feels like our wilderness has been going on forever. It's hard to imagine pre-lockdown life now. My children, who are 6, 4, and 1, barely remember what life was like before this happened. They don't remember being able to go to a friend's house, or birthday parties, or running around in soft play. And I never thought I would miss the chaos and the germiness of soft plays.

And God says to us, you are beloved. In you I am well pleased.

But we've already given up so much, and we've been walking in the wilderness, not for forty days but nearly a year. Forty days in the wilderness was no doubt a very long time, and very hard for Jesus. But I wonder whether those words echoed in his mind as he walked and made it a little bit easier to cope with. Perhaps we can think of Lent as not just a time of what we are giving up, and not just things that we could give up for God: biscuits, alcohol, cigarettes, but maybe we could look at what we have already given up? We've given up things, not for God but for our neighbours. We show our love to them in keeping them safe, by giving up some of our freedoms.

Now I don't mean to discourage anyone who wants to give up something for Lent. And if you can, that's fantastic! But I also wanted to speak to you, to those of you for whom this wilderness feels endless and to reassure you that actually, you are enough.

And what God said to Jesus that day is also what he says to us now.

You are enough.

You are beloved.

And in you, God is well pleased.

It's traditional to finish on an exhortation and a prayer, and it took me a while to think of what to say to you, to exhort you in your wilderness wanderings. But for the next forty days perhaps, well, it's a bit less now, we could think of what we are giving up already and think of it as a love offering to God. To keep our neighbours safe and to keep ourselves safe. But also to feel those words of affirmation upon us. That God is saying to us

You are enough.

You are beloved

With you I am well pleased. **Amen.**