

## **'Man does not live by bread alone' – SJD 8am – 5/3/17 – Matthew 4: 1-11**

Lent provides us with a time of reflection but also, as our Gospel showed, a period when the temptations and difficulties of life can become more apparent. This is hardly surprising given the fact that any opportunity for spiritual growth will be readily attacked by the forces of evil allowed to operate at this time. These spiritual forces are real, though we rarely encounter them in such a blatant form as Jesus does at the end of his wilderness fast. No doubt, like me, you have occasionally experienced the presence of evil in an almost tangible form. It is not something pleasant but as Christians it is not something we should fear either. The power of the risen Christ who indwells us is far greater than any visible or invisible power we may meet.

For Jesus, the temptations came at the end of a period of 40 days fasting<sup>1</sup> during which the physical cravings of the body had been subjected to a discipline designed to allow the inner promptings of the Spirit to come to the surface. In Jesus's case this resulted in 3 temptations. This morning we look at the first one. ***'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread'***.<sup>2</sup> The context of this is found back in Deuteronomy 8. There, God sets out for the Israelites the way they should live, as they leave their 40 years of wandering, eating manna in the desert and enter the 'Promised land'. Jesus, quotes from this passage as his reply to the temptation<sup>3</sup>, suggesting that he may have been reflecting on it during his desert time.

This temptation, as so often with our own, begins with physical needs and cravings. Jesus is hungry and is challenged to use his divine power and authority to change stones, scattered around him on the ground, into bread. For us the cravings and bodily desires may be different. The question is – are we ruled by them or are we free to turn from them? So much of our life can be dictated by our physical needs and desires that we never allow time for our spiritual needs too. But this is perhaps to put too negative a slant on these things. Jesus does not say that food is not important – and certainly it would be as he has fasted for 40 days. Rather he says that life is much more than just food – just the cravings of the body we inhabit. There is so much more to explore and enjoy – so much more to experience and appreciate. These cravings are unbelievably selfish demanding we focus on them to the detriment of other things. By depriving ourselves of something in Lent, we not only exercise our will over our cravings, we also allow space for other delights and joys, not least of all those of a spiritual nature.

But Jesus, by responding to this first temptation, is also making concrete decisions about a path in his future life. The rabbis at the time were ***'clear that when the Messiah came there would be a repetition of the gift of manna in the desert. That is why the Jews got so excited in John 6 when Jesus fed the multitude in a desert place. That is why they tried to make him king.... They knew that when manna in the wilderness came, that would be a sign of the Kingdom breaking in.'***<sup>4</sup> The temptation for Jesus was to by-pass the Cross and all its related suffering and take a populist route to Messiahship. Instead he chose to follow the path His Father had set before him. For us, by turning from physical cravings, we too can see more clearly the spiritual path we are being called to follow and given the spiritual resources we need to follow that path to eternal life.

'Man shall not live by bread alone'. How far do you see your life as much more than just a physical existence? How far are you seeking the spiritual path God has set out for you? True life says Jesus comes from feeding ***'on every word that comes from the mouth of God'***.<sup>5</sup> Draw on all that Christ offers you this Lent. Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:2

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:3

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 4:4 quoting Deuteronomy 8: 3

<sup>4</sup> Michael Green (1988) 'Matthew for Today' Hodder & Stoughton p. 63

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 4:5