

PRAYERS AND THOUGHTS FROM THE WILDERNESS

At the start of Lent, we read the Gospel account of Jesus' sojourn in the Wilderness after his Baptism, during which he experienced various temptations (Matt 4: 1- 11). He was there for 40 days, which in Biblical terminology means "a long time" and it is clear Jesus was dealing with the implications of who he was, what he was to do, and how he would do it. A testing time indeed. From which he emerged strong and able to carry out his 3 year Ministry.

During this time, we are told Jesus ate nothing and undoubtedly was hungry and not surprisingly one of the temptations was to do some miracle to sort the problem. He was isolated, and his life had taken a very different turn than anything he had known so far. He was in a hostile place. As the hymn puts it:-

Sunbeams scorching all the day,
chilly dew - drops nightly shed,
prowling beasts about thy way,
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.

We might not be literally in a wilderness but we may feel the world has become hostile, we don't know who has the virus, who may have had it and who is going to get it, and we are surely physically isolated, admittedly in rather more comfort than Jesus was. At least our beds sound more comfortable! And it is likely that we all have access to food. We are limited by new rules by which to live our lives, and there is much uncertainty. No one knows, or even dares guess when and how this all will end.

One thing Jesus must have done a lot of while in the wilderness was to pray, to talk with God, his Father. This is, of course an option we all have. We can bring our deepest fears, our frustrations, prayers for those in the NHS, the fearful and affected by the Virus, our isolated neighbours, friends and family. And it's OK to let God know how you really feel. If you don't believe me, take a look at the Psalms, there is a lot of raw pain and grief there, even if the Psalmist later affirms their hope for God's mercy. Look at Psalm 22 for instance which starts with a desperate cry of pain and desolation which Jesus later shouted from the cross. I believe Jesus must have drawn on his knowledge and love of the Psalms while he was in the Wilderness and throughout his ministry. For him they may have been his "embedded" prayer that I have previously mentioned.

But the Psalms are not just cries of anger, pain and lament. Take a look at the next one in the book, Psalm 23:-

The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.
He shall feed me in a green pasture:
and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
He shall convert my soul:
and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me:
thy rod and they staff comfort me.
Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me:
thou hast anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full.
But thy loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

I will close with that, for the time being, but take a look at this wonderful book, reflect on it, pray it, shout it, share it.

In Christ's love, Alice