

Mark 1 9-15 Feb 21 2021 1st Sunday in Lent

A man is in the jungle and out from behind a bush jumps a fierce and hungry looking lion. The terrified man prayed. Lord please let the Holy Spirit enter this lion'. The lion paused and then spoke in a clear voice, 'For what I am about to receive Lord, make me truly thankful'

Obviously not a true experience – in reality, the Holy Spirit works mysteriously in and through us empowering us with new energy and new life – a little like that old advertisement (I'm not mentioning what for) - the holy spirit 'reaches the parts that others cannot reach.'

Charles Spurgeon said, "Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without the wind, branches without sap, and like coals without fire, we are useless."

The spirit of God empowered in the past, empowers in the present and will empower in the future.

First- the past - how was Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit?

The baptism of Jesus echoes creation in Genesis, in the beginning, the same 'moved over the waters' and God saw that it was good. When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism, witnesses saw 'something like a dove'- and here too, God saw that it was good, 'with you I am well pleased', said the voice. The baptism marks the turning point for Jesus' adult life and as a result, Jesus becomes, in colloquial language, 'fired up' – he is ready to begin the ministry which will shake the world and still shakes us today. Here is the beginning -the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

This firing up, however, is private and kept from the public for 40 days. 'The Spirit,' we hear, 'immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness'. The one clearly in control and in the driving seat is the Holy spirit and Jesus has little choice but to go. In Mark, there are no details of the temptations by Satan – nothing about stones being turned into bread, nor of the worshipping of Satan or jumping off a pinnacle as a crowd pleaser - we are only told, that for 40 days Jesus was tempted, that he lived with wild beasts and the angels were with him. Traditionally, the wilderness was considered a place haunted by spirits – a dangerous place where wild beasts roamed – a dry place of loneliness and emptiness. It was thought that when the messiah came the wild beasts would become tame - 'the lamb would lie down with the lion' and all creatures live in

harmony: Jesus' success at remaining alive in such company for 40 days is an indicator to the reader that Jesus may be the messiah.

It is in this arid, forsaken place that Jesus prepares himself for his future work: The work of John the Baptist, the forerunner is complete: Jesus is now empowered to heal and to speak God's word into a human desert – quenching people's thirst by offering a new beginning a new creation. It starts with his manifesto: repent and believe in the good news – God's kingdom is here.

First the Holy in the past, secondly the present, how does the Holy Spirit empower us now?

It is extraordinary and maybe a little daunting to reflect that the same Holy Spirit which empowered Jesus, is the same Holy Spirit present today in this cathedral and in your homes.

William Barclay thought we might sometimes miss that fact when he said, 'The simple fact is the world is too busy to give the Holy Spirit a chance to enter in.'

That same holy spirit was with us, however young we were, at our own baptism with water: a symbol of death and life: death for the crucifixion of Jesus and life in that water quenches thirst.



This photograph of The Niagara Falls reminds us of the powerful force of water: the force of the holy spirit can drive us into wildernesses and places we never dreamt of going. The holy spirit is present whether we are in deep grief, in psychological warfare, in isolation, in hospital, in our homes, at times of pandemic and times of freedom: the holy spirit is with us and continues to be a force of both comfort and of encouragement challenging us to venture into new places, new relationships, new possibilities. We have no wish to be a complacent Christian but one who emulates Jesus – so we continue to pray 'Come holy Spirit' in the hope we too may be empowered to tell others of Christ's manifesto – of the good news.

‘What does the Holy Spirit feel like?’ a man once asked me? People have a variety of experiences: some people feel a tremendous force – or a physical burning sensation, or a very quiet peaceful presence. There are many experiences – the holy spirit comes invisibly but we can always see the impact just as we see the effect of the wind on these trees.



When we pray those words, ‘Come Holy Spirit’ - or indeed any prayer - the holy spirit may blow such a gale through us, stirring us into action.

Thirdly the future - how can the holy spirit restore and empower us this coming Lent?

Here we are after Ash Wednesday a few days into Lent – a time when we reflect upon our own failings as we too sit in our own desert, we have 40 days to prepare to walk with Christ through holy week to the cross and then to the resurrection. All of which leads us to being empowered to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ.

Of course, we feel inadequate and not up to the task of telling the good news, but here is an image of how the holy spirit might help.



It is a pot created in the style of the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery called Kintsugi. The story goes of how once there was a time when a valuable precious pot was accidentally broken into small pieces. The emperor demanded that it was repaired using the element of precious gold. After it was

repaired, many thought that because of its restoration, the gold made it far more valuable than before the breakage. Our brokenness in the wilderness is restored with golden strips by the Holy Spirit gluing us together into one piece giving us a new appearance. Once restored, we are transformed and ready to be driven out of the wilderness - to turn to new action for Christ.

Jesus was empowered in the past by the holy spirit at his baptism and so were we, Jesus was driven by the holy spirit into the wilderness and at different time of our lives, so are we today. Jesus told everyone about the good news of God's love and so now must we - today and tomorrow.

And God perhaps will observe, and as we tell of the good news of Jesus Christ, perhaps we will hear those words 'with you, I am well pleased'.

Come Holy Spirit, drive us into and out of the wilderness, restore our brokenness this Lent, and empower us to share the good news of Jesus Christ