**Sermon March 19th 2017 – Jesus in the Wilderness**

*Read Luke 3:21-22, 4:1-13*

Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness…

David spoke about this last week but we didn’t have time to read this story, so that is why we are sitting with it today. But first, let’s watch a video – this is a home-grown Kiwi visual interpretation of these 40 days Jesus spent fasting out in the wilderness…

*Video…* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-6a25Yo2wE>

*Silence… Prayer…*

I know that not everyone likes putting Bible stories into pictures, but even if something in that video did jar with us, noticing that emotion and exploring why we felt that way can be helpful in the process of growing in Christ.

So, as is usual here, turn to your neighbours and have a quick chat about what you thought about that video. Anything surprise you? Anything move you? Anything jar with you?

*5 mins…*

*Feedback?*

Right, let’s turn now from the video back to the original Bible story.

Jesus’ ***40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness*** is a pretty key piece of scripture, it has become a model for Christians throughout the ages in our own experiences of taking a season for fasting or a sabbatical or having time out for more simple living.

It’s also the inspiration behind the whole 40 day season of Lent that we are in now and that leads up to Easter.

But it also pulls together other Bible stories, it calls to mind shadows of other parts of scripture. For example, when we think of the number ***40*** alongside being out in the ***wilderness***, what Old Testament story might we think of?

= *Israel in the desert*

And why did Israel spend 40 years out in the desert?

= *they didn’t trust God and refused to enter the promised land.*

This is where our call to worship from Deuteronomy comes in where we read together a version of these words from Deut 30:19-20

19 “Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

20 You can make this choice by loving the lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the lord, you will live long in the land the lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

“*Oh, that you would choose life*!”

As we all face every day, two roads were placed before the people of Israel. The road that leads to life, and the road that leads to death – with God yearning for us to choose life. The road to life comes through loving God, trusting God, and following in God’s ways. Jesus called us to this again when he said that he had come to bring us life, and life in all it’s fullness – a life we receive when we welcome him into our lives with faith.

The road to death therefore comes by rejecting Jesus and what he stands for, it comes by not trusting God and not following in God’s ways. Most days, in many and varied ways, we face the same choice as well. Two paths are before us, will we choose life, or will we choose death?

The Old Testament tells us about how *Israel rejected God and did not trust God*time and time again – which I’m sure many of us have done pretty often as well. As a result the Israelites end up wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years.

Jesus though *does choose life*! He does trust God and he does follow in God’s ways… *yet he also* ends up out in the wilderness, though only for 40 days.

He turns 30, goes to get baptised by John in the river Jordan, receives the power of the Holy Spirit and a voice from heaven affirming him and the mission he is about to begin… and then the Spirit thrusts him out into the desert…

***Israel*** ends up in the wilderness because they choose death. ***Jesus*** ends up in the wilderness because he chooses life… Weird eh?

I’m not sure I totally understand why that is, but it would indicate that in the spiritual life, a season in the wilderness is not necessarily a bad thing, and it might be important. In fact, Jesus kept seeking out some wilderness time for solitary prayer throughout his later ministry – he seemed to like it!

For the Israelites their 40 years was a time of purging.

The current generation had rejected God, making bad choices and choosing death over and over again. They had refused to trust God and enter into the blessing of the promised land, and so God left them to wander around in the desert until that generation had passed away and a new generation had emerged who were given the chance to start again.

With Jesus though, his time in the desert seems more like a time of refining and focus and preparation, not purging.

Jesus has received the power of the Holy Spirit! He has received a word from God! He’s ready to go!!!

But first he needs to be emptied out and brought low. First he needs to confront temptation and the satanic voices that come from inside and outside, calling him away from trusting in God. It is not right for him to burst out onto the scene without first facing some demons…

What then might this story say to us today?

1. Perhaps we’re sitting here today and ***life is going swimmingly*** for us, things are pretty good and we’re happy. Hallelujah! That’s awesome!

I’m in that kind of space at the moment. We aren’t in the wilderness, but this story can still speak to us.

For David spoke a bit last week about the example God is giving us here of how to use power, of being restrained. Because Jesus was empowered and at the top of his game! However… the Spirit calls him to have this wilderness time before he is allowed to go out and use that power. So too for us perhaps?

Perhaps we have a sphere of power at work or at home? Perhaps someone has made a mistake or messed something up and we have a righteous reason to exercise that power via email or a face-to-face chat, calling that person to account?

Cool… but perhaps we can remember the example of Jesus here, and first take 40 mins out to walk around the block, calm down a bit, and to remember and face our own weakness, before we unleash our righteous power.

I remember my dad doing that when I phoned him to confess that I’d crashed his car. He told me he had to hang up, calm down, and phone me later or he would probably yell at me… That was good restraint in using his power as the car owner I thought!

So, **make space for time out in life**.

Whether long or short; when you’re facing a particular situation *and* just out of habit… Give yourself wilderness spaces now and then. Seasons for simplicity, prayer, and maybe even a bit of good honest struggle (I’m sure tramping counts, as long as you only walk short days and do actually factor time in for solitude and reflection).

Jesus did, so it must be good for you!

א 2. But, some of us will be sitting here thinking, “Nathan, I don’t need to make space for a time in the wilderness, because life has already thrust me out into the wilderness without my choosing it!”

And we’ve all been there eh? Big or small, we’ve all had to endure a season of hardship or directionlessness (my word!) or regret or fear at some point.

As with the people of Israel, sometimes this can be of our own making, our choosing death rather than life; *but sometimes it isn’t*! As we see in Jesus, sometimes the path of life leads through the wilderness too.

This can be a very hard season. It can be a time of purging and refining which sounds great, but the process of refining usually means that something has to pass through fire which doesn’t sound so great.

However, from today’s story of Jesus in the wilderness, hopefully we can see that these seasons do have an end! And hopefully we can recognise and take heart that Jesus has been there and can relate - God is in the wilderness too.

In fact, sometimes it is in the wilderness that we have our most profound encounters with God, and are prepared for something new and blessed.

I conclude by reading again from Deut 30

19 “Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

20 You can make this choice by loving the lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life.

*This is the key to your life!*

So, choose life!

Choose life in the big decisions, as well as the small ones we face every day. Choose life even in the hard times, even in the wilderness.

God wants you to, God made you to – choosing life is choosing to be who you were made to be.

And part of choosing life is opening ourselves **and asking God to fill us with his Holy Spirit** – the Spirit that empowered Jesus.

The Spirit that *drove* him into the wilderness to prepare him for what was to come, but also the Spirit who *sustained* him in his time of weakness and struggle.

So let’s come before God now in a brief wilderness moment of prayer and reflection.

Let us commit ourselves again to the path of life, and let us ask again for the in-dwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit within us.