

## **Sermon 01 March 2020**

**Readings:** Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; Mathew 4:1-11

### **The Temptations**

#### **FSHS**

Every parish Minister can tell you that writing a sermon is a bit like having a baby. It may take a couple of hours, or it may take all week, as you engage with the chosen Bible readings for Sunday. Every Minister also knows that the sermon must be delivered by Sunday at 10.00 am – or the sermon will have to be born by caesarean section.

Thank fully, this week, the ideas and images grew and flowed pretty quickly as I read the lessons for this week. All three Bible passages contain strong ideas that apply to our own lives. I feel relieved when that happens.

**Today, I am going to concentrate mainly on the Genesis reading and the Gospel reading, as we begin the season of Lent, the season of self-examination in the light of the Scriptures, and in the light of our understanding of Jesus.**

**All of readings today have to do with the very human struggle of making choices. Especially ethical choices.**

**The first reading was from Genesis 2 and 3, was about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the choices that lay before them.**

**The second reading from Romans 5 was about the universality of sin – or our disconnectedness with God, and our inability to forget ourselves enough, to be able to love universally. That's all I'll say about the Romans reading.**

**The first thing that strikes you about the first reading from (Genesis 2 and 3) and the Gospel reading (Mathew 4) is the huge visual contrast between the 'Garden of Eden' in Genesis, and the 'desert wilderness' scene in Mathew 4. Both of these extremes are depicted as the theatres of human temptation.**

**In the first scene - the Garden of Eden – man and woman have everything they could possibly need, the peace and beauty of the garden; more food than they could ever eat. There's a life-giving stream flowing through the beautiful garden. It is paradise. And of course, Adam and Eve have one another. They have love and companionship. They are 'living the dream' as they say. Living in the Kingdom of Heaven – or in the generous reign of God'.**

But that all-sufficient garden becomes the theatre of their Temptation.

***For despite the fact that Adam and Eve have everything. They are not satisfied – and want they more ...***

The story beautifully illustrates our human condition. That no matter how much we have; ***we do not know how to refuse our appetite for more.***

Nutritionists will readily tell you that appetite and hunger are not the same thing. Your appetite is that part of you that continues to crave for food even when you have eaten enough. Its almost like an independent voice inside saying:” Feed me! Feed me!” even when you’re full. We are never fighting hunger; we are fighting our appetites.

I know I’m guilty of giving way to my appetite. Especially when it comes to food. I eat far too much. And with so much food readily available around the house in the fridge and in the shops around Havelock North, I literally have to learn ***to refuse my appetite for the ‘more’.***

That is always our temptation, especially in an affluent First-World society. ***How do we refuse our appetite for the ‘more’?***

Some people would say that Havelock North is like the Garden of Eden. I don’t like ‘rich bashing’ any more than I like ‘beneficiary bashing’, but we are living in one of the wealthier suburbs in Hawkes Bay, and in New Zealand. We’re surrounded by more fruit than we can eat. Rivers of wine begin their life in the vineyards of Havelock North and Hawkes Bay. And there are a lot of beautiful gardens in Havelock North. Most people in Havelock North are not poor. **And our temptation, or our test is, ‘to refuse our appetite for more’.**

I’m just reading a good book entitled, ‘Life as a Casketeer’. The book is a sequel to the TV series, “The Casketees”. The TV programme is about a Funeral Directing Company in Auckland owned by Francis and Kaiora Tipene, a Maori couple, who run one of the most popular and successful Funeral Directing Companies in Auckland. The TV show is very funny and is now very popular in the UK, Australia and the USA (as a piece of ‘Reality TV’).

When I read the book about Francis Tipene’s upbringing, in a small Maori settlement in Northland. I couldn’t believe that people in the 1980s, in New Zealand, were actually living without running water and electricity! But that’s how the Tipene family lived in the 1980s and 90s. Francis was raised by his grandparents, who were both pensioners. They lived very frugally with no electricity and no running water.

I used to think I was brought up in a poor family, but in reading the book, I felt as though my family had been spoilt growing up. In fact, I felt like a prince compared to Francis Tipene.

**He and his wife Kaiora are now what we might consider to be, “successful business people” and their children will grow up wanting for nothing.**

**The Children’s Commissioner, Judge Andrew Becroft, repeatedly tells us that even today, almost one in four New Zealand children lives under the poverty line. In our local community, Pure Catering have been contracted to provide lunches for children in some local schools. Very sad, in a land of plenty.**

**The challenge for wealthy Christians, or the relatively wealthy Christians, is, ‘how to live modestly’ today and refuse the appetite for more.**

**Or ‘how to use our relative wealth to help others’? That may not be achieved by simply ‘giving money away’.**

**It may better to contribute to Charities that are better able, and better organised, to reach needy people.**

**Organisations like Presbyterian Support and ‘Nourished for Nil’, and other organisations that are especially designed to reach the needy people we don’t come across every day.**

**In stark contrast to the picture the Garden of Eden, is the desert scene, in our Gospel reading (Mathew 4).** There is no beautiful garden. There is no food in abundance. There is no life-giving stream of water. And Jesus is alone, with no human companions. The desert is a dry, arid place.

**This is the theatre of Jesus’ temptations. In the desert where there is nothing** Jesus refuses the ‘more’ that is offered to him by the Tempter - in favour of living in/under the reign of God. I prefer the word, ‘in’ the reign of God. ‘Under’ the reign of God, suggests that God is some distance away from us. ‘Up there’ as opposed to ‘with’ us. The One in whom we live and move and exist.

**In the story of the Temptations, it was the ‘Spirit’ who led Jesus into the wilderness, not the Devil (Matt 4:1).** Jesus had just come from his baptism in the river Jordan, where the Holy Spirit had come upon him in a powerful way. There, at the River Jordan, Jesus had taken on the identity of, ‘the Beloved Son with whom God was well pleased’. He was full of the Holy Spirit and at the height of his spiritual powers.

**In the wilderness, Jesus had to choose ‘how he would use the new found power’ that had been conferred on him.**

Would he use his power to satisfy his own hunger? And his own physical needs.

Would he use his power for his own glory? Making God a kind of servant to his own purposes?

Would he use his new found power to broker a deal with the world? Making the reign of God a secondary vision?

**In every temptation, Jesus put the reign of God first, something Adam and Eve in the Genesis Story failed to do.**

**In this season of Lent, these stories of temptation, remind us that we have everything we need. And that we have the power and the ability to choose how we will use the power(s) that God has given us.**

**How we use our power is entirely over to us as individuals and as a church.**

**If we stand with Christ, we will seek first the reign of God in our own time. The reign of God that has helped to transform the world in the past, and the vision of the reign of love, will continue to transform the world of the future. We are, each one of us, part of that Hope and part of that vision.**

**FSHS Amen**