

Sunday 6th March 2022
1st Sunday of Lent (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Deuteronomy 26.1-11
NT: Romans 10.8b-13
G: Luke 4.1-13

I have the privilege of working with an amazing team who bringing caring and expertise across all the aspects needed in a rehabilitation unit. From the housekeepers to the healthcare assistants to the therapists. Included in the team are two nurses who are originally from Poland. One nearer my age, has lived in this country for some years and is a British citizen while the other is Emily, my daughter's age and while she has a young family here, she has retained her Polish citizenship.

I have been able to watch the appalling events in Ukraine evolve through their eyes and experience. The older nurse reliving her young years in a country under Soviet control and then the hope and challenges of the Solidarity movement and the sweeping changes across Eastern Europe that took place in 1989. 1989, the same year the younger nurse was born. All her family are still living near Cracow, in the south of the country and close to the border where thousands of Ukrainians are now fleeing for refuge from the evil bombardment orchestrated by the greed and insecurity of Putin. (For illustration, just compare his approach to life to that of Zelensky.)

Both nurses feel helpless, as do many of us, and both have inspired us to give whatever practical help we can. This week we have collected medical supplies, clothes, toys and toiletries and sent them in vans full to the Polish collecting station here in Liverpool. We all continue to pray and wait in anxious hope that courage will overcome cowardice, that good will overcome evil, that democracy will overcome dictatorship.

In this context, the Old Testament reading today can provide us with a challenge. *A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.*

There are some significant differences to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in comparison to the arrival of the Jewish people in the promised land. The events of last week have been mindlessly brutal; what challenge does a maternity hospital present? Russia has invaded a country to prove that it can, to metaphorically put up two fingers to Western powers.

As the reading from Deuteronomy says the Jewish people had become slaves in Egypt and were searching for freedom in the land that God had promised them. I do not claim that all was well then or now but it would take a very large book written by a great scholar with far more education than me to outline the story of the Jewish people, their land, their exiles, their persecution. I can, however, recommend a good novel based on the experiences of two men, one an Israeli Jew, one a Palestinian Arab, both trying to live in the same country.

It's called *Apeirogon* by Colum McCann.

But back to today's readings and their message for us in the context of our Lenten journey.

The gospel story is so familiar to many of us as it comes at the beginning of each Lent.

The temptation of Jesus in the desert. This encounter of good and evil as the devil seeks to overcome his adversary at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Look at what Satan offers as temptations.

First he identifies our weaknesses, in this case Jesus' hunger, and attempts to wheedle his way in to urge us to satisfy our needs at the price of our integrity. Jesus' response

One does not live by bread alone.

We need more than material goods for our happiness and ultimate salvation.

Next comes the temptation of power. One we have seen in action this week. Worship the devil and he will give you authority over whatever you choose. An empty promise because evil can only offer misery and power without responsibility can only end in disaster for all concerned. Bullying others will never bring happiness and satisfaction.

Finally, the devil tempts Jesus to put God to the test. Having faith in God is not the same as attempting to use him for our own advantage. God works for us when we surrender to his will and not our own, when we believe that our loving God acts always in our best interests, best interests that we cannot rarely define. We have to trust that he sees the whole picture and we know that *all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

We know that ultimately the darkness cannot overcome the light. Through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus has conquered death and brought us back to eternal life. But this does not mean that the devil does not continue to chance his arm in this flawed world.

He continues to look for weakness, for greed for power, for arrogance in those who believe that God is redundant.

We are exhausted having lived through a pandemic and now seeing the spectre of war in Europe with its wider global connotations on the horizon. It would be easy to fall into depression and hopelessness but Paul's words to the Romans continue to uplift

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Let us take the opportunity of this Lent to listen to the word of God in our hearts, to draw near to him in prayer and reading, to take time for rest in his presence. So that we might be refreshed in our faith, in our ability to bring hope and help to others, to find again God's purpose for us in this life which in turn will bring us to eternal life in the joy and blessing of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose