

10 am HC Sunday 5 March 2017

Lent 1

Gen 2:15-17;3:1-7 and Matt 4:1-11

**Collect :**

Almighty God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in  
the wilderness,  
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:  
give us grace to discipline ourselves in  
obedience to your Spirit;  
and, as you know our weakness,  
so may we know your power to save;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Or**

Heavenly Father,  
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,  
and grew closer to you in the desert:  
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom  
and prayer  
that we may witness to your saving love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Sermon: Encountering God rewrites our story.**

### **PRAY**

The Bishop has gone. The ice cream is eaten. The jazz band is silent and even the choir has shrunk. But the memory of Monday night is in my head and heart and I want to thank all of you who helped to pull it all together.

Since Monday I have discovered that the church keeps tripping as it's wiring is condemned and that we have rats.

I have also discovered that taking on a church is just like having a baby –because I have had several broken nights this week as I've suddenly woken up to remember I have this new life in my care and its terrifying! I have also experienced that immense joy each time I remember that life and how much I have prayed and longed for it. For you. And the people who live work learn and plan in this neighbourhood.

And so here we are. In a new season for all of us. Learning new names and faces. Learning how things work and what doesn't work! Understanding how we all tick and get

along. One of my priorities is to meet with all of you one to one. I would like to hear your story of faith and your history with St Michael's.

And you need to get to know me. You will be sounding me out. And building up trust may take us a while. But here is something you can trust me about; I will let you down.

Because I am human and I struggle every day to do the 2 simple things that lead to a perfect life, to Love God first and my neighbour second. And because I suspect I am not alone in that – you are likely to hurt me too. But here's the more exciting part. We are a church. A community under Jesus, the Easter People and so although we expect injury we also expect forgiveness. Because we have been forgiven so much, we can forgive others. The quality of our relationship will not be measured in how perfect we are, but in how forgiving we are. To put it in Northcote Road terms we might well push each other off our scooters, but we are to commit to helping each other back on them again with the words "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you."

And knowing that God's purpose in Jesus was to forgive us when we say sorry is a good place to start as we enter the season of Lent, as we did on Wednesday. And I want to thank those who came and helped with "Ashing on the Street" on Wednesday. If you go on the St Michael's twitter account you will see the pictures of people stopping to be prayed for and blessed. The team was amazing – so out of their comfort zone. But let me read you this to encourage you that these things are the kinds of things that God loves:

Read Whatsapp message.

And that idea of feeling the presence of God is on theme for this lent.

You will know if you made it here on Thursday night that my prayer is that **we at St Michaels encounter God during lent.** And in this first week of Lent we are going to look how **encountering God changes our story.**

So lean in – take notes, look up passage and nod and smile from time to time because a church gets the preaching it calls out of its preachers.

So how does an encounter with God change our story?  
Let's look to the Bible.

In our first reading from Genesis we saw Adam and Eve fall foul of the tempter's schemes. This is poetry that gives us profound insight into the truth of our origins and our understanding of who we are and who God is. God has made us out of love and declares before we do anything that we are good.

In Gen 3 the tempter got the humans to forget that they were good; precious and unique children of God and begin to imagine that God was holding back from them. They became discontent with who they were and that led them to stop trusting God and eventually to disobey God. And the power of that moment was that it became the defining identity for all of us. All humans became ashamed of themselves and that created a barrier between us and each other and us and God.

Do any of you know the musical "Matilda?"

In it the main character, Matilda think about a whole load of stories that go badly. Jack and Gill, Romeo and Juliet and she wonders why they didn't "Just change their story." Matilda is a child genius with magical powers and so she actually does change her own story. From unloved and bullied she rewrites her story so that she ends up cherished in a happy home of love.

But I am not a genius. I do not have magical powers. So I cannot just change my story. I need more help than that.

But something happens in Matthew 4 that does change the story for all of us. Jesus changes humanities' story.

Its so exciting when you see the cosmic nature of what is going on here. Jesus deliberately sets out to put right what went wrong, in Gen 3. This is quite deep theology its picked up by Paul in Romans and again in Hebrews, but it is also the stuff of a good movie.

Lets imagine the scene a bit. In Gen the tempter approached the couple, but here Jesus goes out to find the tempter. Jesus takes the initiative where we had lost it.

In Gen the couple start in the sanctuary of the garden but here Jesus leaves what is safe to take the devil on in the chaos of the wilderness. Jesus takes the risk on our behalf.

Why? Because he is a child genius with magical powers? No just because Jesus knows who he is and trusts God. Look at Mt 3:17. Jesus hears these words and chooses not to question them, just to stake himself on them.

Just like in Gen 3 here in Mt 4 food and pride become the points as which the devil attacks, but here Jesus, totally human like us as well as totally God all the time overcomes where Adam and Eve fell. The devil tempts and Jesus doesn't fall.

For the first time in the history of the planet a human walked the earth unbound to sin. The devil had no dirt on Jesus. Nothing. Sin is all that puts me first at the cost of my relationships with God and others. Sin is what makes me ashamed. But Jesus overcame sin here. The final victory comes at Easter but it is no wonder that the demons see Jesus and cry out from this moment on, because unlike Adam and Eve Jesus knows who He is and

walks content and obedient in His true identity. Jesus has changed the story and the devil doesn't know what to do.

He's tried his best lines. Twice the devil has said "If you are the son of God..." wanting Jesus to doubt, to question the relationship that He has with the Father. To doubt His very nature. The devil is attacking Jesus' identity because that worked so well with humans before who said in response to that temptation "You're right, maybe I'm not as special as God said I am." And many of us have heard that voice. "No one likes you anyway."

"Who do you think you are?"

"she doesn't love you, you realise."

But it doesn't work with Jesus. Jesus says "Since I am the son of God I am going to keep trusting God."

Jesus changes the story of broken trust and human rejection of the God who loved us by playing the whole scene again. Jesus as God comes to find us. Jesus as human comes to rewrite our story. And so we who choose to trust in Jesus get to reclaim our original identity. We are once again the children of God chosen and loved.

That is a new story of which even Matilda would be proud.

How do we live that out day to day?

Most simply by being thankful first thing in the morning. Thanking God for who we really are and setting up the day like that. It doesn't take long. EG....

And this lent an encounter with God might look like Jesus rewriting the scenes of our own story where we have been tricked into a false identity. This kind of encounter can bring incredible freedom and change in our day-to-day way of thinking and acting. Jesus might want to change our story today.

For example where we live out of a false identity that began at school because of bullying – Jesus says I love you and you are precious. Let me change that story.

Where we live out of an identity that says I am rubbish at letting people get close to me - Jesus says I love you and you are made for others. Let me change that story.

Where we are living out of a feeling of defeat that says and nothing ever changes— Jesus says I love you and you are made for creativity. Let me change your story.

Where we are living out of a the pressures of keeping up appearances in the hope that people will like us – Jesus says I love you and you are deeply known and deeply important. Let me change your story.

Knowing who we are – not failures who have let God down and need to be ashamed, but loved unique children of God, is the first step in encountering God. That is life changing.

The first place that many of us encounter Jesus and where we keep encountering Jesus is in the pages of the Bible. The bibls can feel daunting and for that reason I have got a load of little Luke’s Gospels to give out this lent. Lent is about doing what we can, not what we can’t so please take a gospel with you today and begin to read it. Let me know next week if you have had an encounter with God through doing that. It might help if you read a section and then ask yourself what was going on in this scene?

How does what I have just read change my story?

For those of you who would like to take steps to encounter God afresh today and to ask Jesus to change your story I will be in the lady chapel with one or 2 others immediately after the service to pray for you. Then I want to see lots of you over coffee so don't run away!

Encountering God is the aim of this lent. Encountering God will change our story.

AMEN.

Notices:

Lent Course Thursday 7.30 God the Father

Thank you to flyer deliverers

Friday morning 06.30 Prayer