



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Lent 1 2020

Welcome to this meeting of the St Marylebone 1st Century Judean Amateur theatrical wilderness re-enactment society...Oh? That *is* why you're here?

Well many people think that it is. 40 days of re-enacting the Lord's privation and temptation in the desert.

Where he had no food or drink – we have not Cadbury fruit and nut.

Where he had the devil – we have Gail's bakery on the corner by the station.

When you put it like that it doesn't sound very likely does it?

As much as I love fruit and nut, and will miss gin with *grief untold* in the coming days – it's not really the point.

And nor is it what St Matthew seems to want us to take from His Gospel either. He intends to give us so much more, something really worth living for in Lent.

So let's look again at what's going on here.

What St Matthew really wants us to see is the Divine Son-ship of Christ. Matthew is an educated Jew writing for Jews, this gives His Gospel a particular angle.

And His pre-occupation is that we see this wilderness as a place in which Christ is revealed to be who He is: Divine. For Matthew it seems that this passage isn't really about deprivation or will power or angels and demons, it is about knowing Jesus to be Jesus.

So who is He? It may sound a silly question.

But I suspect it's a question that many Christians would confess to being a little shakey on. And it's certainly a question that the generation coming through now, who have grown up with almost no Christian understanding or nurturing – they *are* asking the question. They are open and curious and hungry, but have no language or framework or childhood knowledge to fall back on.

So St Matthew and us are actually in a strangely comparable situation.

The world around us does not know Jesus, but in a funny way *is* open to His friendship.

This makes it all the more important for us to know our onions if we are going to serve the people with whom we live our lives. In the words of the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy: we have to really know where our towel is.

So who is He? Who is this Jesus Matthew is so keen to show us? In the ensuing Gospels we will hear that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of man. Being gentiles, these titles might puzzle us. To St Matthew and His Jewish Christian friends, they would have made complete sense. In fact they are a bold and categorical statement.

For Jesus to be the son of man He is the successor to Daniel's prophecy in the Old Testament. The son of man is a liberator, messiah. This is a title Jesus directly takes to Himself. It is not, however, a *divine* title. The son of man is a bringer of freedom but he is a man. Human.

Jesus is also shown to be the Son of God. His Divine sonship is S. Matthew's particular concern in today's Gospel passage. My dad, Rob, and I are both human. I can only be his son because we are the same species, I *share his nature*. So to call Jesus the Son of God is not to say He's God's successor or *junior* – but to say that this man *shares God's nature*. He is *Divine*. Fully human and fully divine. That is what the Gospels are trying to tell us whenever they refer to Jesus as Son of God or Son of Man. Only a man can die as Jesus will die on that lonely hill. Only God can, by dying, abolish death. Jesus is both.

And then there's today's dialogue itself. Each time the devil has a go at Jesus, Jesus responds with a quotation from Deuteronomy. Indeed the term son of God and the theme of testing itself comes from Deuteronomy. Today's whole testing narrative is intended to be held in the light of ancient Israel's asking: 'who is God and how does He relate to His people?' St Matthew's answer, our answer, is to turn to Jesus.

There is a joke, especially prevalent (and true) amongst clergy who do lots of assemblies in primary schools. The answer is always Jesus. It doesn't matter what the question is. The answer is Jesus. There's little Freddie, cross-legged, picking his nose on the front row not paying a blind bit of notice. Suddenly Fr whats-his-name has asked him a question. 'Jesus?' 'yes, that's right'. Phew. Well in this case, it really is the right answer. St Matthew does not bid us abstain from after eights and Doombur for a few weeks. St Matthew wants us to see who it is that we meet in these Scriptures, who it is that feeds us with His life in the Eucharist. *Who* it is that moves in us when we pray by the Holy Spirit. *Who* it is that will bleed and die for us. *Who* it is that will trample down death that we might live with Him forever.

So I'm not going to ask you what you're 'doing for Lent'. Instead, let's ask ourselves: how will I join St Matthew? How will I get to know Jesus better this Lent? So that who He is, and just what that means for my life - the big stuff and the everyday stuff - might be given to us this Lent?