

TFTD 2023.3 Friday 24th February: Matthew 4.1-11

Jesus in the wilderness



Looking across over the fertile plantations of Jericho to the Mount of the Temptation

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.
Matthew 4:11

There is something very satisfactory about walking in the hills in inclement weather wearing all the right kit so that the weather doesn't affect your progress. Your boots are more than a match for the rain and the mud. Your waterproof trousers and coat are keeping you completely dry but without making you sweat and your hat protects your eyes from the rain. You are indestructible. Nothing can stop you. You triumph over the elements. It is a glorious feeling.

When Jesus went into the wilderness there was nothing the devil could do to tempt him. He approached him first through his empty belly. Nothing doing. He appealed to his vanity. No chance. He offered him power. Jesus sent him packing. He was immune to the temptations of the devil. He triumphed where we routinely succumb.

That's great for him, you may say. But we don't have that kind of power. We are like people who have got caught on the hillside without the proper kit. We are cold and shivering in our T-shirts, sandals and shorts as the wind and the rain come down. When we get hungry we will compromise our principles just to fill our bellies and human vanity and a seeming need to exercise power over others are well known aspects of the human condition and easy ways for evil to enter into our lives and perpetuate the brokenness of the world.

So, what is the point of Jesus parading his special ability to withstand the devil's temptations? What difference does that make to us?

The difference is that we have the example of Jesus before us. And this example leads us into thinking that people do not necessarily give into evil because they are hungry, because they are vain or because they desire power over others. Giving into evil is not inevitable. We do have the power to resist.

And people have resisted evil before us. This week saw the 80th anniversary of the execution of Hans and Sophie Scholl who were murdered because of their resistance to Nazi regime by calling publicly for the war to end. Their memory is hugely important to German national identity today. In a society where so many people failed resist evil because resistance seemed impossible, the Scholls did resist, in a conscious attempt to imitate Christ.

In the Letter to the Hebrews (12:1-2) we read:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

The letter references people who have in the past at great cost not given in to evil and urges its readers to be inspired by them and by the example of Christ to resist evil also.

In which parts of our lives are we going along with things because we think resistance is impossible, unsustainable, or futile? In which aspects of our lives are we giving in a bit too easily? In what ways can we too

look to Jesus and follow in his way?

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