

Sermon for Online Family Service: Pott Shrigley 21st February, 2021.
First Sunday of Lent.
Rev David Swales

Mark 1:9-13a; Matt 4: 2-10 *What makes me, me?*

This sermon is probably better viewed on our live-streamed service recording, as it involves slides to illustrate the points! But I believe it can be read without the slides.

Do you remember this story from our last family service? It was right at the start of Jesus' ministry – before the start, even – and, to help him get ready, Jesus asked John to baptise him.

As he came out of the water, something amazing happened: the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove...

...and His Father's voice came from heaven: This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.

I think those words must have been very important ones for Jesus to hear at that moment. He was about to start his ministry, showing people, in his deeds, and his words, that he was the one the Father had sent, had sent for us. So, as he set out on his ministry, Jesus needed this affirmation from his father, affirming that he was the beloved son ...

...and, whatever lay ahead, he would need firmly to hold on to that truth; that, while he might be many things, preacher, healer, miracle-maker, carer, friend, most important of all, he was God's beloved son.

What about you? There's lots of things that make you, you – where you live, what you look like, who your relatives are, what language you speak, what things you like, what you are good at – but there is one thing about you which is more important than all those: if God can say of you.... 'This is my Son/daughter, whom I love; with him/her I am well pleased'. If God can say that of you, it is the most important thing about you. And it always will be – more important than all those other things.

Straight after his baptism, Jesus went to the wilderness, where he stayed for 40 days and nights. It was a time to prepare himself for all that lay ahead, by spending that time alone – or, rather, alone with God, his Father.

I'm quite sure that, as he sat, and thought, and prayed, those words from his recent baptism were echoing in his mind:

... This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Nothing was more important about Jesus than that – and he knew he must hold on tight to it, whatever lay ahead.

And ,as he prayed, he also fasted – that means he didn't eat anything – for the whole 40 days! Now, sometimes we may fast – go without something – as part of our prayers: but we certainly wouldn't try that! So, of course, Jesus was extremely hungry.

It was just then, the Bible says, that Satan, or the Devil, came to tempt him. Did Satan stand before him, like in our picture? Did Jesus hear a voice? I don't know. Or did it come, just as it sometimes does to us, as an idea, a thought, which suddenly popped into Jesus' mind? Either way, it went like this:

'You're so hungry. If you really are God's beloved son, use a bit of that god-like power. See these stones? Don't they look like loaves of bread?! Well you could make them into actual bread!. Where's the harm in that?

That's a good question. Where is the harm?

Well, it goes back to that question, 'what is the most important thing about Jesus – and what's the most important thing about me?' Answer...

That we are God's son or daughter, loved by him. Nothing is more important.

But the devil is trying to bend that truth for Jesus. He's wanting Jesus – and us - to think that there is something more important

– that I am What I can Do.

When you think about yourself, do you think – I'm the person who is good at this or that.....

...all good things, of course; but are they the most important thing about you? No! The most important thing is that you are a Child of God, loved by him.

Jesus knew this, and so he rejected the idea, the suggestion – the temptation....

...and he went back to his prayers.

But it wasn't long before another temptation came along. I wonder if Jesus had started to think about what lay ahead? How would he get people to listen to him? What if they just weren't interested? If they ignored him?

And just like that, another thought in his mind, or voice in his head. 'Here's how you get people to listen! Come with me to the highest tower in the temple, and at the busiest time of day. Get everyone to look up at you, then – jump off! If you are God's beloved son, God will send his angels to catch you.

Just think how amazed everyone will be! They will certainly listen to you – they will believe you, even follow you!'.

Do you see what Jesus is being tempted to believe? That it is what others think of him that matters most:

- that I am What Others Think Of Me.

We can be tempted like this too – it's so good to be popular!

But, once again, Jesus realised that he was being tempted to think that something else was more important than being His Father's beloved Son.

And he told the Devil – No!

Again he went back to praying and preparing himself. As he sat there, I wonder if he began to think of all the difficult times ahead, all the sacrifices he would have to make, all the pain he would have to bear.

This was a chance for one last temptation. 'It doesn't have to be like that', the Devil suggested:

You shouldn't be going out there to suffer, he said; you should be going out there to rule, to lord it over people, to have power, your every wish fulfilled. After all you are the Son of God. Just do things my way, the easy way, not God's difficult way, and you can have power, status, riches – instead of pain and struggle.

We, like Jesus, are often tempted to think that the most important thing about us is our position , our wealth, our status.

- 'I am my Position , Wealth, Status'.

It can seem very attractive to have those things. And many spend their whole life seeking them.

But they are things which we can have one day, but then lose the next. And they are worthless compared with that wonderful gift which, once we have it, can never be taken from us: the gift of being God's beloved Son or Daughter....

Jesus knew that. God's way wouldn't be easy. But it was the way of life, and love. And through it all, he would know that he was his father's beloved son.

Once again, he told Satan where to go – and then, his time of preparation at an end, he left the wilderness, ready to begin his work.