



First Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 10th, 2019

Heaven and Earth, Thin Spaces, Testing our Neuroses



Gibson Desert, Australia

Today we begin the Season of Lent. Lent is all about seeking a deeper reading of human beings as we reflect upon the drama of Jesus' life, ministry and execution, at the hands of religious and political power. Having journeyed through Epiphany and the vision of what it means to be Christian living out Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, and Jubilee, we discover that it is not easy: in part because of the creative courage required, but also because of our inner resistance, the complexity of our inner-selves, which flows into our relationships and the way we view the world. Today we begin with the story of Jesus' most human moment: his temptations and the struggle to deal with his potential neuroses and to re-channel his desire.

OUR GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God our Father and Mother
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with

And also with you

Let's Sing: I danced in the morning (TiS 242, Lord of the Dance, Sydney Carter)

Opening Prayers

This is a prayer that picks up the 'plain-speaking' and confronting themes of Luke's account of Jesus' testing. Like Matthew's version, the issues raised for Jesus and for us, have to do with the claims of bread (economics), of metaphysical power (religiosity and religion), and power (politics): all of which serve as powerful forces that only feed our anxieties and neuroses: as Ignatius of Loyola puts it in his Spiritual Exercises, our "disordered affections"

He's been doing a lot of testing
 this devil fella.
 Tried it on with Jesus.

What do you want? We can sort it for you.

Comfort? Wealth! Income! Assets!

We'll put you into the top ten percentile,
 (that's half of the nation's wealth),
 you won't ever need to work again.

We can arrange some good tax breaks, too;
 we've got some top-shelf accountants on our lists.

Celebrity? Religious celebrity?

Bishop? Evangelist? Guru?

The film crew will be around in the morning.

You can relax, it's been a long time since fame
 was a function of achievement.

A small team of spin -doctors;
 should be able to provide

the fifteen-second witticisms
needed to satisfy the media.
Twitter works well.

Power? Influence?

Bit too late to choose your school,
but you'll find that your hitherto mentioned wealth
will go a fair way towards compensating
for your parents' oversight.

Just three principles; commit them to memory.
You've worked hard and deserve everything you've got.
You are a generous person,
but you can't be held responsible
for other's failures.
It's people like you who keep the economy ticking over.

There you go! What more could you want?
We'll go ahead, then?

Did you say, No? Really?

What's God got to do with it?

Amen

The Peace

SMG

Introduction

Lent Event

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about Desire

I put for the general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceases only in death.

Thomas Hobbes

You are made in the image of what you desire.

Thomas Merton

Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge.

Plato

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Ignatius of Loyola

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Good News Translation)

Deuteronomy is set in the context of the Israelites gathered on the east side of the Jordan ready to cross the river into the promised land. The book purports to be a series of speeches by Moses to them. Today's passage, which comes near the end of the longest speech (Deut 4:44-28:68), anticipates a time when Israel has come into the land and settled there. The passage constantly reminds the reader, as Moses did the Israelites, that the land is a gift from the Lord (vv. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11). The offering is not symbolic of taking possession or claiming ownership of the land. Rather, it has everything to do with recognising the land and its bounty as a gift. This fits with the broad ecological sympathies of the Hebrew Bible, where the land is not simply a means for generating wealth, but part of God's living creation that must be respected and honoured, in a post-Exodus, free world.

26 "After you have occupied the land that the LORD your God is giving you and have settled there, ² each of you must place in a basket the first part of each crop that you harvest and you must take it with you to

the one place of worship. ³ Go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, 'I now acknowledge to the LORD my God that I have entered the land that he promised our ancestors to give us.'

⁴ "The priest will take the basket from you and place it before the altar of the LORD your God. ⁵ Then, in the LORD's presence you will recite these words: 'My ancestor was a wandering Aramean, who took his family to Egypt to live. They were few in number when they went there, but they became a large and powerful nation. ⁶ The Egyptians treated us harshly and forced us to work as slaves. ⁷ Then we cried out for help to the LORD, the God of our ancestors. He heard us and saw our suffering, hardship, and misery. ⁸ By his great power and strength he rescued us from Egypt. He worked miracles and wonders, and caused terrifying things to happen. ⁹ He brought us here and gave us this rich and fertile land. ¹⁰ So now I bring to the LORD the first part of the harvest that he has given me.'

"Then set the basket down in the LORD's presence and worship there. ¹¹ Be grateful for the good things that the LORD your God has given you and your family; and let the Levites and the foreigners who live among you join in the celebration.

Romans 10:5-15 (Good News Translation)

Nev Stutchbury

This snippet comes from Paul's very difficult discussion in Roman 9-11 about Israel. He stood accused of betraying his own Jewish tradition by effectively declaring that Israel's status as God's people now counted for nothing. How could Paul do such a thing? Are his accusers then right that he was trying to set up a new religion? Why, then, bother about the Old Testament at all? Marcion, a leader of the later Church would later argue along these lines. Paul engages in a range of arguments in Romans 9-11, finally reaching a climax where he asserts that God has not abandoned the promises to Israel. Israel is still special to God and there will be hope for them in the future, even though now they seem determined to reject Christ and the Christian message. Paul has no idea how this will happen. What is central to Paul is the idea that Jesus is beyond rules and laws. Rather, God gets right into people's hearts and minds. His argument is that this has a dynamic effect which the system of obedience to the Law did not have and so is another reason why religious rules or legalism as he sees it, should be taken off the shelf.

⁵ Moses wrote this about being put right with God by obeying the Law: "Whoever obeys the commands of the Law will live." ⁶ But what the scripture says about being put right with God through faith is this: "You are not to ask yourself, Who will go up into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down). ⁷ "Nor are you to ask, Who will go down into the world

below?” (that is, to bring Christ up from death). ⁸ What it says is this: “God's message is near you, on your lips and in your heart”—that is, the message of faith that we preach. ⁹ If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, “Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.” ¹² This includes everyone, because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to him. ¹³ As the scripture says, “Everyone who calls out to the Lord for help will be saved.”

¹⁴ But how can they call to him for help if they have not believed? And how can they believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear if the message is not proclaimed? ¹⁵ And how can the message be proclaimed if the messengers are not sent out? As the scripture says, “How wonderful is the coming of messengers who bring good news!”

The word of the Lord'

Thanks be to God

Luke 4:1-13 (Good News Translation)

Jane Chorley

To offer a brief comment on this passage, also found in Matthew, is really difficult. Clearly Jesus was surrounded by expectations about what he would and would not do, and had to confront his own neuroses or “disordered affections”. If we read back into this reading through the lens of the early Church; it too found itself in difficulty as it acted on the mission for the kingdom but found itself in a quandary over the question of its place in society and the power that it was ceded as it became more established. The question in this reading is then not just for Jesus but for the Church and for Christians and others, who have to manage the question of power in its various forms and the impacts that this power has.

4 Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert, ² where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. In all that time he ate nothing, so that he was hungry when it was over.

³ The Devil said to him, “If you are God's Son, order this stone to turn into bread.”

⁴ But Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Human beings cannot live on bread alone.’”

⁵ Then the Devil took him up and showed him in a second all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ “I will give you all this power and all this wealth,” the Devil told him. “It has all been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose. ⁷ All this will be yours, then, if you worship me.”

⁸ Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!’”

⁹ Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the Temple, and said to him, “If you are God’s Son, throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For the scripture says, ‘God will order his angels to take good care of you.’ ¹¹ It also says, ‘They will hold you up with their hands so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.’”

¹² But Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

¹³ When the Devil finished tempting Jesus in every way, he left him for a while.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Come as you are (TIS 693, Come as you are, Deidre Browne)

About Desire

One of the most perceptive films made in the last 20 years, is *Chocolat*. Set in a pretty, insular French rural village, established Christianity is of little help in mentally and emotionally opening the community up. The neuroses already well established through isolation are only exacerbated by a parochial and sequestered traditionalist Catholicism, which covers over and becomes complicit in the violence of the town. Let us be clear here! The denomination is immaterial. It would not take much, to transplant this reality into a closed British, American, Korean, or Australian Protestant context.

The clip begins with the flight of Josephine, the abused wife of Serge, to Vianne Rocher’s chocolate shop, for safety. The all-powerful mayor, the Comte de Reynaud, a force to be reckoned with, intervenes seeking to resolve the situation through the imposition of church doctrine, believing that this will fix the issue, even though, it is the ‘Christian’ rules and regulations that have been responsible for the problem from the very beginning. (42:36-46:34)

Some thoughts...

Let's Give**Doxology**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication**Prayers of the People**

John Egarr

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, "May we see more clearly". The response of the community, "So we may live more honestly".

Song: I the Lord (TiS 658, Here I am Lord, Daniel Schutte)**Blessing**

May we see everything with new eyes,
May we discern the spirits within us and among us
And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

Closing Musical Meditation: May the feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)**Closing Postlude****Organist:**

Tony Ireland