
The Rainbow – Remembering God’s Commitment to Life on earth
Genesis 9:8-17

Throughout the country in the past year, rainbows have appeared everywhere from coloured stone to painted pictures in windows of homes and shops. They have been offered as a sign of hope that all will not be lost and healing will come. They have been associated with gratitude for the work and self-sacrifice of NHS staff and other key workers during the pandemic. Widely also seen now as symbols of inclusion and welcome forming an arc over all people regardless of sex, race or religion.

NASA’s *Perseverance* space probe has reached Mars and is now testing for signs of past life – even if may not get samples back to earth for another generation. But in Genesis, the rainbow was and is and will be a sign of the covenant, the promise and commitment of God to every living creature, that God will not let flood water destroy all life on earth again. A sign that that reassures us that ***the Lord remembers us***, remembers that even though we will go wrong, the forces of destruction will not overwhelm us. This is the promise of God on which we rely whenever the heavens open and waters rise. And echoes of this as Jesus at His baptism emerged from beneath the water of the River Jordan and was reassured of God’s love. More of that shortly but first *Great is Thy faithfulness*

Reflection 2: Tested to Breaking Point –Great Expectations Mark 1:9-15

“I want to get away from it all!” It is a cry that many know well. Even if we do not say it, no doubt most of us have had the feeling of needing a break from the pressures of daily living to find some peace, clarity & renewed sense of purpose for life. & now nearly 12 months into lockdown, isolation, home working & home schooling, what was initially a short sunny break from our daily routine, we want a break from that break. The Christian Church has always stressed the importance of getting away for quiet, for prayer and listening to God.

After His baptism in the fertile lush Jordan valley, Jesus went into the parched scrubland of a wilderness area. The time that he spent there is usually referred to as the *Temptation* of Jesus and we can all relate to feelings of temptation. But it is probably better to think of it as a time of ***Testing***. For whereas temptations sneak up on us when we are not expecting it, when we are being tested, we know exactly what

we are getting into. When Jesus walked away from the crowds to spend 40 days in the wilderness, He knew what He was doing. He was going to test Himself.

How many of us deliberately place ourselves into positions where we know we will be tested? Some of us relish that challenge but many of us would rather find the path of least resistance, the easy way.

Chapters 4 in both Matthew and Luke's Gospels give similar details, details presumably passed on later to His disciples, of 4 challenges but Mark just says ***Jesus was tested by Satan***. Behind these few words lies an understanding that Jesus fought a colossal battle against the power that brings evil & darkness into the world. Jesus comes through this *testing* by following God's way: the way not of manipulation & compelling power but of love. And by a time set apart in prayer and also attended by angels – We too can know this.

We like to know that goods we purchase are tested to breaking point; it reassures us to know that the car we drive has been crash-tested to ensure it survives and perhaps, we too are reassured that Jesus has been tested to breaking point.

Great Expectations

Being *tempted* “*as we are*”

means He understands our struggles

but these temptations were especially *His*.

He needed time and space to decide what He must do.

For years, He'd had a growing awareness that He could be Messiah;

and He had learned that God is like a Father,

but never with the depth and intensity of this experience of *Abba*.

In the wilderness, He fused the 2 ideas:

He wrestled with what was expected of *Messiah* in the new light of the Father's love.

In the desert beyond Jordan,

where the flat white stones looked like cakes of bread:

The Messiah when He comes will meet all physical need....

but if you live the way of love

you cannot settle for instant material benefit,

you have to care for wholeness, and you cannot bribe people.

In the hills, where the plains of Esdraelon, scene of Israel's greatest victories,

.... lay before Him:

The Messiah when He comes will lead a great army of men and angels

and restore Israel's greatness....

but if you live the way of love,

you cannot bully people to force them to do what you want;
He chose the way of non-violence.

In the distance, the sun glinted on the pinnacles of the Temple:
The Messiah when He comes will have supernatural power....”
but if you live the way of love you cannot brainwash people:
they must be free to choose and will get no special treatment.

He chose the way of life,
to be like *Abba, Almighty God His Father*,
but He knew His testing had only just begun.

He told His disciples about all this
because there are parallels for His Church:
Don't treat people as less than they are or try to force them to do what you want;
don't ignore the bits of scripture you don't like
and don't expect any special treatment.

**It means mission as well as ministry,
outreach as well as fellowship,
healing as well as teaching.
And don't compromise love for the sake of relevance or popularity.**

**Jesus wrestled with people's expectations
but what do they expect of you?**

So many pressures & problems are caused by what parents expect of their children,
what children expect of their parents,
what neighbours expect of you ,
what society expects of the church,
or the church expects of its ministers;

**And what do you expect of God,
Or what do you think God expects of you,
And most of all what you expect of yourself.**

Don't settle for less than you can be;
don't try to be what you can't be; & don't expect what is not promised.
God does not threaten you with a big stick,
or want to you to feel guilty, or ashamed or afraid.

**All He expects of you
is that you trust Him
and do what He says.**