

Sermon Lent 1 2015 Year B

I have talked about taking up and giving up for Lent. Jane Williams, wife of Archbishop Rowan writes: "Lent challenges us to remove some of our safety nets. Most of us do that in very small ways.... It is frightening how hard it is to manage without these inessential luxuries. Many human beings, of course, manage daily without such cushions. But Lent is not just an exercise in breast-beating and self-testing. Its basic questions are: "What are you here for?" "What do you depend on?" "Where do you get your self- definition?""

Many of us may get or have got our self-definition from our job titles, the work that also gave us a reason for being, and the knowledge that we depended on. Sometimes that makes retirement hard, particularly for professionals, whose whole being was wrapped up in their work life.

However the story of Noah is clear about the answers to those questions. All life is utterly dependent upon God. If God did not choose to preserve it, it would not be. We try very hard to isolate ourselves from natural forces. We have electricity to take away the power of night and day and provide 24 hour entertainment. Medicines to fight disease and all sorts of things to keep old age at bay. And yet, when things fail, when natural forces hit us, even such a minor inconvenience as snow we are outraged.

Jesus is baptised and goes to the desert before starting his ministry. He is about to demonstrate to us the answers to the questions above. He is going to submit totally to God's will. He will accept what he is here for, he will relinquish all control.

What would it feel like to relinquish all control over your life to God? How could you walk so closely with him that you knew his will for you, each and every day? One thing I am certain of is that our church life and our personal lives would be very different. Perhaps some of our constraints are caused by personality or up- bringing. The difference perhaps between a manicured council flower bed and the exuberance of a cared for, but untamed garden. Taking this analogy on, its not about tidying a powerful, loving God in neat rows to be looked at when we have a walk in the park, but allowing him full reign in the garden we live in. Yes there will be some brambles, but they have pretty flowers and useful fruit as well as thorns, and nettles which can sting or be used as medicine, but it will also be full of life.

There can be three versions of the garden used to illustrate our relationship with God; one that is tidied within an inch of its life and nothing is allowed to happen that is not controlled by the human gardener; the second is one that is so neglected nothing really thrives, some plants strangle others, some are deprived of sun and space; the third is the one cared for with love by the human owner which allows nature a chance to surprise, to challenge to be beautiful.

God our creator walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, it was beautiful and he was in close communication with those he had created in his own image, this is what we were destined for. Jesus came to earth from his place in heaven to show us God's face, the glory of which no longer needs to be veiled, he demonstrates a life devoted to the Father, a life of obedience, a life of close communication with the Father.

I am Church of England through and through, I use the Liturgy to praise and worship God, even the Daily Office but also I have space and inclination, for more informal, spontaneous communication with God. Not enough I am ashamed to say, I am definitely a work in progress!

But our prayer this Lent could be to try to depend more on God, to be like Jesus and Noah, who both obeyed God and let the wind of the Spirit direct their lives. In the power of the Spirit may we dedicate our lives to God and let him be fully in charge of his creation.