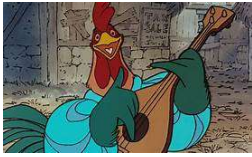


SERMON, LENT 1, 6 MARCH 2022 – DEUT 26.1-11, LUKE 4.1-13  
*At St Matthew's we are baptizing Vivienne – so the sermon reflects this celebration*  
*Peter Barham 050322*



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our reading from Deuteronomy, scholars tell us we have gone back to one of the earliest passages of the bible. You can imagine it, perhaps first as a legend told round a camp fire – the same tradition of the storytellers of the Icelandic Sagas or Alan a Dale, the Bard of Robin Hood. You can imagine it, a story told to the children – so they knew their history, their tribe, their past.



“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor” (older translations use “father”, which is probably more accurate) “A wandering Aramean was my father, he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.”



A story about Jacob, *sing*, Jacob, Jacob and son – the father of Joseph and his technicolor dreamcoat, the patriarch of the tribe. They went to Egypt in time of famine, then a few decades later were taken into slavery by the Pharaoh and his people, then made their escape through the Red Sea in the company of Moses, travelled through the wilderness, came into the Promised Land – and we tell the story. And the Jews are good at telling this story – right up to today. The candles are lit on the sabbath and the story is told. The Passover celebrations include the story.



Our Society is much worse at telling the stories of our past. In our fragmented families, it is harder to learn the stories of grandparents and their grandparents. In a world where we move about the country and where the idea of being local has almost gone – we don't know the stories of our place. One of the wonderful things about the internet is it has given us a worldwide reach – but we have lost the idea of being local. We've lost too the stories of our religion, our faith – we are now several generations past the time when the stories of Jesus stopped being told in a family context. Our church schools still tell the stories – and our Thursday morning Toddler Group has a story of Jesus every week – but most of our children, our grandchildren, are not exposed to those stories, do not know them. There's a job for the grandparents – make sure the stories are told.



It is a story that is repeated over time. A story of men and women being oppressed, being freed, and being told that that must underpin the way they treat others. It is wonderful seeing how most of Europe is welcoming refugees – there is a memory of a past when so many others have had to flee, so they will help those who are fleeing now. From an academic point of view, it is fascinating that that memory, that concern, does not extend to many residents of this island – the stories that we have been fed are of Rule Britannia and our superiority (may God forgive us). But it does have to be said, that people being refused exit from Ukraine because they are African or Indian in origin, is also the working-through of a story, a narrative – very few countries have successfully embedded a multi-cultural story, the true Christian story where are human beings are made in the image of God.



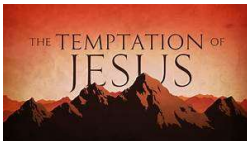
I love the way that this story is told in the context of a feast, a party, a celebration, a meal. We've missed those over the last two years – it was wonderful to sit in Pizza Express with Davina on Friday night. Daughter of one of my churchwardens in Ponteland, she must have been 14/15 when we first met

her. Now a Junior Doctor at the Manchester Royal Infirmary – and you realise what lovely people teenagers can become. Remember that when Vivienne is a horrible teenager!



Let's hope that in the next few weeks we can get back to Sunday coffee, to meals and gatherings – and over this summer, if we've got the church open, let's just hope we can sort that sometimes the kettle is on, someone's made some take (or even been to the shop) and we can sit and talk. I think that's probably the most important thing we do over the next few months, just bring people together again.

In this story, it is not just the history, or the food, or the meeting – it is putting everything in the context of God – his love, his care, his challenge. God has given us this place, this food, these friends, this story, this freedom. That is what we need to teach Vivienne and all our children, and each other.



The Gospel tells us that humans do not naturally do God – we are just as capable as following the devil, the evil, everything that is wrong. We've seen that this last week. “Go on, Jesus, you've got this power, use it” – and Jesus had to fight against those temptations. Humans have incredible power – the power to take all the world's resources for ourselves, to take another country (or to control another human being), to believe we are gods, and to live as if we control everything, as if we have all we need for life, to be incredibly selfish human beings. Those urges, that evil, needs to be fought. We fight it with love, we fight it with learning, we fight it in God's strength.



Traditionally Lent is the time of preparation, the time of preparation for baptism on Easter Sunday. We're breaking all the liturgically rules by baptizing on the first Sunday of Lent. Well, we may be – but we baptize in joy and celebration, and we baptize knowing that this young lady will need love, prayer and support from her church family – as we all do. She'll need it in Lent, she'll need it a crazy, evil, sinful world – and she'll need it in joy and celebration, and in our Easter faith.