

## **Sermon for Sunday 9 March 2025**

### **The First Sunday of Lent**

**Deuteronomy 26: 1 – 11; Romans 10: 8b – 13;  
Luke 4: 1 – 13**

#### **Power**

Today I want to think about power and the exercise of power.

There's a great deal in the news that prompts me to think about this. It's as if the new President of the US has been trying out all the various forms of power now at his disposal. Executive orders. Putting tariffs onto goods traded with other countries, and then removing them again. He knows even his words are powerful. Especially when said on the megaphone of social media. Saying one thing one day and something contradictory the next has also caused plenty of waves. Is it a bluff, or a game, or is it deadly serious? Some of it looks distinctly like bullying. The world watches, reels and is now attempting

to readjust fast to the new reality. An unpredictable US. Power on the loose.

What a contrast with what we have been seeing about Jesus and his power. Last week we were thinking about the Transfiguration when Jesus is revealed in all his glory and proclaimed by the Father as his Son, the Chosen. Now we've moved back to an earlier point in his life, just after his baptism, when God has pronounced very similar words over Jesus. "my son, the Beloved" (Luke 3:22). The Holy Spirit descended on Him at his baptism. Now he propels Jesus out into the wilderness for something like single combat with the forces of evil.

Jesus, as Son of God, has immense power. Power over nature, over demons, over illness and even over death. The temptation in the wilderness is all about how He will choose to use that power. It's immensely important because what happens in these 40 days will set the pattern for his use of power during his ministry. Over and over again during the course of the next three years he is

going to have to make decisions about how and when to use or not to use his power. Every time he heals or performs a miracle, every time he finds himself in distress, difficulty or danger.

So, how does he respond to what the devil sets before him? First, after 40 days of fasting he is invited to turn a stone into a loaf of bread to satisfy his hunger. On the face of it, this is not such a terrible thing to do. After all, he needs nourishment to stay alive. But he has entered fully into his humanity. He's not going to take short cuts. He will live and suffer as all human beings do. He refuses to use his miraculous powers for his own self-interest. They are to be solely at the service of others.

The second temptation invites him to become powerful in worldly terms if only he will worship the devil. This is precisely the kind of earthly power and authority it was expected at the time that the Messiah would exercise. The question is, does it come now – or only after Jesus has fulfilled his mission on earth in the way that His

Father intends? The temptation for Jesus is again to short-circuit the costly road he must travel, to take the easy path and avoid suffering. He chooses to worship and obey only God the Father and refuses the devil's offer. He will wait until His Father's time.

The third temptation is to test God, by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, because God has promised protection for the Messiah. According to some verses in Psalm 91, God will surely rescue him. Such a stunt would be a wonderful way to launch a career as Messiah. But Jesus sees the trap. He's being invited to test God, just as the people of Israel did in the wilderness. He refuses. What he will experience in Jerusalem will be not fame, glory and recognition, but instead rejection, humiliation, shame and death. That is the Father's will, and that he will fulfil. When it comes to it, Jesus will choose not to exercise his powers to escape arrest, to outwit those who try him. When taunted, he will choose not to come

down from the cross and prove that HE is the Son of God.

And for what? Because he knows this is the path that His Father has chosen for Him. Contrary to all expectations, this is what it means to be the Messiah.

Jesus, God's Son, with all of God's power at His disposal, chose to die, helpless, rejected and powerless. He chose, as Philippians puts it, to "empty Himself", because "he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited". (Philippians 2: 6 – 7).

For what did Jesus do this? For us.

In complete obedience to the Father, Jesus chose not to misuse his power, but ultimately to lay it down. To show us definitively what God is like and how much he loves us. As we see Jesus dying on the Cross, God is saying, 'Look how much I love you'.

God's model is power is exercised in compassion, love and complete understanding of the other. There is no bullying or coercion, only patience. He simply waits for us to respond.

By the standards of the world, this is crazy. Giving up power is not the way to get a job done. But it is the way God chose to deal with us.

Perhaps it can also be a model for us whenever we find ourselves in positions of power – which may be more often than we realise. To be open-handed, to invite a response, but never to engage in emotional blackmail, coerce or compel. To let God act as and when he chooses to do so.

At his temptation, when Jesus made those choices about his power he was setting a pattern of costly service and obedience to God for us all.

Amen