

Mark 1:9-15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

This is the first Sunday of lent and the set Gospel passage for the day takes us to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. He is baptised by John in the Jordan and then immediately Mark tells us, "the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where Satan tempted him." What the temptations were do not seem important to Mark, he addresses this event in about 25 words. The last 6 words struck me as I just read this passage "and the angels waited on him."

The angels, messengers from God, were with Jesus, not to prevent him being tempted, not to protect him from Satan but to remind Jesus that he was loved by his heavenly Father.

Jesus heard the words of affirmation at his baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased"; then came this time of testing. Unlike Israel, as a nation, who saw calling as a privilege not a vocation of responsible service to God, Jesus shows at the start of his ministry he is prepared to walk the way he was called regardless of the cost.

Jesus is taken the way of the wilderness not in spite of his faithfulness to God's call but because of it.

In the dark times of life, which most people have to go through at some time, there can be the ministry of the angels assuring us that we are not alone God still loves us.

Often in our faith journey this time of assurance and blessing can be followed by a time of trial and temptation. Palm Sunday celebration shortly before Good Friday pain; we know the story does not end there for Easter Resurrection is the story.

In recent months the wilderness experience has been something of a reality for many. That which normally sustains us in our equilibrium of calmness has been removed. We have been removed from physical contact with many people; removed from social gatherings; removed from simple pleasures of leisure activities, meals, theatre, museums, concerts and sport. We have had little opportunity to meet in church fellowship and when we have it has been lacking close proximity, singing and coffee.

In this time of wilderness have you heard the angels waiting upon you reminding you that you are loved? Have you encouragement that there can be positive things that can come out of these difficult times? Have you been reminded that ultimately this earthly time is but a part of the fuller eternal dimension of the things of God?

As the Passion of Christ ended with resurrection so Lockdown will end with a new freedom, where life shall be lived differently. We pray that humanity will learn how to live this new life with generosity towards all seeking justice and peace for all.