

# ***Tested Not Tempted: Noah & Jesus***

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church February 21, 2021 – Mark 1:0-15 & Gen 9:8-17)

This week we find ourselves in the season of Lent. Lent is the season of 40 days leading up to Easter. Traditionally it has been a time of reflection, and where I grew up, a time to deny yourself something – chocolate, sugar, things you really liked. You can see how these actions are deeply connected with the story of Jesus being ‘tempted’ in the wilderness.

In our bible readings today, we find two men tested, Noah and Jesus. Noah the laughing stock of the community, daring to build a boat when there was no sign of rain and then taking his family and all the animals on it for 40 days plus. Jesus, after a significant experience at his baptism, finds himself propelled or driven out into the wilderness, by the very same spirit that alighted on him at his baptism.

The people of God have always been tested at times. Think about Abraham, his faithfulness to God tested when asked to sacrifice his son Isaac – yet God’s faithfulness on display when a ram appears to be the sacrifice instead. Think about the whole story of Job, tested and yet God’s care is also revealed. Think about the Israelites, tested as they wandered the desert for 40 years – but God’s faithfulness is also on display.

I wonder if we might take another look at this story of Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days.

The story as recorded in Mark’s gospel is very brief. Just two verses. For greater detail we need to go to Matthew or Luke, but let’s stick today with what Mark describes and doesn’t describe.

The first thing to note is that there are not any temptations listed, no sense of being tempted by food or power or safety. So, let’s look at what Mark tells us.

First, the Spirit drives him out into the wilderness where he is tested. The desert or wilderness has always been understood as a place of encounter with God. It may be harsh and isolated and fairly silent but, in my experience, it is not devoid of life. Sure, it can be isolating, but, sometimes we need that to think more clearly, to see things as they are, to remove ourselves from distractions.

The Greek word here is better translated tested than tempted. Being tested and being tempted can be quite different. Think about an exam or a test – there is no temptation here (unless you are tempted to walk out), rather it helps us see what we do know, what we need to learn more about or what growth we need to do. Perhaps that is what is happening for Jesus? Out in the relatively silent wilderness, Jesus is thinking about who he is and what he is being called to be and do. I wonder what thoughts and questions went through his mind. Did he think about what was important to him – forgiveness, reconciliation, care, compassion, giving? Did he consider things that he couldn’t bear – lies, corruption, wielding power without concern for those you wield it over? Did he think about how he was going to go about his ministry and how he would counter the likely opposition from the powerful? Whatever went on for him out there, I think there is a sense that God is with him, God’s Spirit has driven him out into the wilderness and I suspect stayed there with him.

Secondly, Jesus is in the wilderness with the wild beasts. There is no sense here that the wild beasts cause him any harm. It has a sense of companionship about it, harmony. Noah helped protect the animals, now, maybe, there is a sense in which the wild beasts were looking out for Jesus.

Thirdly, he is tendered to by angels. I am not sure what is meant by this except that there is a sense that God's care never ceases. No matter where we are or what state we are in God's care is always present.

I think our stories today provide a bit of comfort in testing times (and haven't we known that a bit in the last year).

The people of God have always been tested – they have always had to ponder their call and its implications for their lives.

Jesus knows what it is like to be tested. He has shared that part of our humanity. Questions about life and ourselves are okay.

God is with us both in the testing and in the aftermath, in fact he never leaves us.

Finally, back to Noah, the rainbow is a sign for everyone. A sign that God loves the world and will never let it perish. God will always care for the creation and for us. God is always loving and faithful. There is always an opportunity for recreation and there is always hope.

This Lent, may you take these 40 days or so to reflect on your life and the call God makes on that life. May you think about what you can do rather than what you should deny yourself (or maybe a mixture of both). May you remember that God is always with you and will always send his messengers to care for you. May you know that God always wants life and not destruction, that is what the rainbow reminds us of. Amen.