## Week 1

## Prepare yourself by reading Luke 4.1-13.

## Reflections on the Gospel reading.

## This forty day period of testing in the wilderness happened after Jesus’ baptism in the Jordon by John and before he began his Galilean ministry.

## Jesus lived during a time and in a community where most people thought that Israel’s best days were behind them. The time of Israel’s last period of independence was a distant memory while they endured the Roman occupation of their country. Their ‘here and now’ was a hard time to be endured. No one was happy about having the Romans occupying their country and everyone coped with it in different ways.

## Some people collaborated with the Romans in order to survive. These were the Sadducees who are mentioned in the Gospels. They were associated with the priestly ministry of the temple in Jerusalem. They were opportunistic pragmatic people who’s motto might have been “if you can’t beat em, join em”.

## Another large group rejected any form of cooperation with the Romans beyond what was necessary. These were the Pharisees who organised the worship life of the synagogue in towns and villages throughout Judea and Galilee. There were Romans everywhere in their community but the Pharisees lived in their present moment by trying to ignore them.

## A minority of people saw the Roman occupation as an opportunity to find a leader who would raise an army and toss the Romans out. They coped with their ‘here and now’ by retreating into the glory days of the past and devising strategies for making their nation great by relying on their own strength and swords.

## Finally there were groups of people who gave up on living in a Roman-controlled community and retreated into the wilderness near the Dead Sea. These folk believed that the present time was evil and that those who participated in everyday life were being used to perpetuate and extend an evil corrupt community. They believed the world was beyond redemption and that God would destroy it but spare them.

## Into this time and place John the Baptiser appeared. People took notice of him. He looked like Elijah, God’s great mouthpiece from the past with the same demand that people must live justly. John believed in living positively in the present moment by taking on God’s enemies. He did not however see the Romans as the enemy. Rather, the enemy was the sin and disobedience of God’s people. He reprimanded everyone from the King down to ordinary folk with special mention of soldiers and tax collectors. He called on everyone to see their present time as a last opportunity to repent of their selfish lives of sin, and to turn their lives around because God’s judgement was about to arrive. All were called on to be baptised as a sign of their own repentance. John’s water baptism however, would be nothing compared to the coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the ‘fire’ of cleansing judgement.

## Into this electrified atmosphere Jesus stepped forward with crowds of other repenting folk and asked to be baptised. We are familiar with the brief accounts of his baptism. John seemed reluctant, Jesus was insistent, and God suddenly appeared in the present moment in the form of a loud voice and a dove.

## Now came the wilderness testing. God, through the Holy Spirit, led Jesus in the wilderness to have his faithfulness tested. Mark’s version makes God’s involvement more explicit – “the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness”. This testing and temptation story is an interesting one that reminds us of the Old Testament testing stories – the wilderness-testing of God’s people after the exodus from Egypt and the testing of Job’s faithfulness. Here, as there, God allowed his dear one to undergo a testing by God’s opponent. The bottom line in the testing was to see where Jesus will put his trust and who will he chose to serve. Jesus held firm and decided that the only way of living usefully and fulfilling his mission was to remain faithful to God’s way. The tempter knew that he was getting nowhere at this early stage of Jesus’ kingdom ministry so he departed until ‘an opportune time’. The tempter would return in the garden of Gethsemane to again try to turn him aside from being obedient and faithful to God.

## This issue of faithfulness would prove to be an ongoing issue for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus would always resist and remain faithful. Later we see that Judas and Peter would both forfeit their discipleship in moments of bad-decision; one betrayed Jesus, the other denied him and both ran away.

## The word in the original Greek text of the story in verse 13 that is translated into English as ‘opportune time’ is *kairos*. In the Greek language the usual word for time was *chronos*, which referred to calendar and clock time – years, months, weeks, days, hours, seconds etc. The wilderness experience here is described in a chronos way as lasting for forty days and nights, and according to the calendar this was when Tiberius was the Emperor and Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Kairos differs from chronos because kairos describes the significance of what happens during chronos time. A kairos event changes everything for those involved; life will never quite be the same after a kairos event. John’s preaching and the baptism and testing of Jesus were huge kairos events. After these events nothing would be the same for God’s kingdom and for the followers of Jesus.

## Think about – courage to start following Jesus and to stay following

## Our choice of whether or not to follow Christ is a kairos moment for us that has eternal significance. Our life in the world is changed forever by what we decide. If we say ‘yes’ to the call to follow, we have a new agenda for living in our present moments and a new strength to do so. Those of us who were baptised as infants have no memory of this new beginning with Jesus, apart from perhaps a certificate and some family photos and memories. However the time should come for us to affirm that this what we want and not just what others wanted for us.

## I was confirmed as an eleven year old in St Albans Charlestown in the Diocese of Newcastle. After several months of after-school lessons where the catechism was imprinted on us, the great night arrived and I was absolutely engaged in the moment. After we made our promises to turn to Christ, the forty or so young people formed two lines in front of Bishop Housden. As we moved slowly forward to have the bishop pray the blessing of God’s Holy Spirit upon us, the lad in front of me turned and pointed out that I was the only boy present in short pants and then all I could focus on was my awareness of being different. It’s not easy to remain focussed in the moment and our thoughts and focus can easily be drawn away.

## Our rector who prepared us for confirmation, Rev Michael Clark, gave each of us a little book called In His Presence and in it he wrote a verse of scripture which the Holy Spirit then imprinted on my heart and mind. The scripture was Revelation 2.10 “Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life”. I became aware of the gravity of the promises I had made. I had signed up to a lifetime commitment and there was no going back. I then tried hard to be faithful to God in my life-contexts and present moments at home, at school, with my family and mates.

## Following Jesus had practical implications. Jesus could only be followed in my present moments, not in the past or the future. I was painfully aware that if I failed to engage with people and issues that shared my moments and space, I would be failing as a follower. I also knew that the biggest failure would be to give up following. This issue of life-long following is addressed in our current baptism service. “Will you each strive to live as a disciple of Christ, loving God with your whole heart and your neighbour as yourself, until your life’s end?”

## Think about – courage to live your faith here and now

## Following Jesus is no bed of roses. Some people find it too daunting to even start following, let alone imagining what a lifetime of following will be like. I once had a conversation with a young man who said that he wanted to be connected to a greater power to give meaning to his life. As we chatted it became apparent that he had read the Bible and he admitted that he had thought seriously about being baptised and following Jesus. He rejected this however as being too hard and too illogical. He said that if he followed Jesus he would have to adopt a Jesus-lifestyle that had implications for living. He would have to live generously and get involved positively in the lives of others. Following Jesus would require him to forgive people when they wronged him, love strangers and enemies, serve people and encourage them. No. It all sounded too hard and he decided that he would go it alone and make looking after himself his first priority.

## Things haven’t changed much from the time of Jesus. Most people then felt afraid and wanted to keep their heads down to avoid trouble. Today it’s just as daunting. Following Jesus requires courage and every-day commitment. It’s tough. There is a cost. When we live the values that Jesus taught there will be opposition. Jesus describes this following as ‘taking up our cross daily’. The great 20th century German follower Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it ‘the cost of discipleship’ - see below some links to bio stories of some followers in the past century who taken up their cross and followed to the life’s end.

## Many who follow Christ in 2019 in other parts of the world, experience restriction and persecution from aggressive adherents of other religions or by secular governments. They require great courage and our prayerful fellowship. We who follow him in Australia also require courage and commitment, even though our following of Jesus is far less likely to land us in court or in a hospital. We are called to stand up for the just treatment of those who have inadequate employment and housing, for asylum seekers and Indigenous peoples. We are called to stand up for the protection and restoration of the environment. Our Anglican Church describes the here and now following of Jesus in terms of the Marks of Mission and these have been picked up by almost all Anglican Dioceses as an excellent summary of how we must live in our present contexts as followers of Jesus.

**The Five Marks of Mission**:

* To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
* To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
* To respond to human need by loving service
* To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
* To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth