

Lent 1 (2025)

I confessed last week that 'I was a glass half-full kind of person' but it seems I am not alone! If you manage to stop around our town to look at the many and varied black 'n white posters in the shop windows... celebrating yesterday's 'International Women's Day'...it is amazing to see how local stories of local women really turned that kind of thinking around. They should be called women of courage, and women of hope.

On yesterday's 'Saturday Kitchen Live' (a programme with plenty of laughter, sometimes so much so that the cooking details can get forgotten)...well there was a familiar face there, from children's television of old, Floella Benjamin. She proudly said that her book 'Coming to England' is now in every primary school in the country. It tells of her moving from Trinidad to Chiswick at 10 years old and her family all living in just one room in a completely different culture, and climate. It is a tale of courage overcoming fear and prejudice and a tale of hope most of all. From humble beginnings and now to the House of Lords, she is still campaigning for human rights and those of children in particular, for their education and welfare. She still beams with that radiant and confident smile!

Thinking of our dramatic first reading from Deuteronomy, it is a similar biblical tale of a difficult journey, adapting to a completely different world from that which you have had to leave. How vividly this resonates with the plight of women

and children in Gaza and Ukraine today or people desperate enough to risk crossing the channel in an inflatable dinghy. Think of their cries to the Lord and the irony of this human plight today, when we read in verse 8, “The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm... and he brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Is this the same picture language in today’s familiar Gospel Reading of the wilderness being such a place of change, challenge, and transformation? Are the temptations of Christ actually about digging into a barren landscape only to discover there, living waters of hope and fruitfulness?

St Luke is not fooled by the distractions and temptations of a ‘quick fix’ answer to life’s challenges - any more than he is fooled by the ‘absolute power which corrupts absolutely’ – a phrase attributed to Lord Acton at the end of the 19th century. No, Dr Luke does not present his Christ as a magician or miracle-worker; neither is he presented as a capricious King or dictator to be worshipped, feared or humiliated by.

I suggest this time in the wilderness was something radically quite different. This was the special time when Christ put his complete trust in God our Father as the bringer of that Spirit of hopefulness which sets us free, which makes us stronger, and which helps us to live closer to Him every day.

If I may return to my ‘mate’, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, he quotes from St Augustine’s description of heaven in ‘The City of God’: ‘We shall **rest** and we shall see, we shall **see** and we

shall love, we shall **love** and we shall **praise**, in the end which is no end.'

Like the best of preachers, Michael teases out these four words: resting, seeing, loving and praising. He says they "describe not only the goal of heaven but the message of Christianity in the world. The world has lost the way of resting, seeing, loving, praising. Swept along in ceaseless activity the world does not pause to consider. With no resting and no considering, the power to see is lost: to see where we are going, to see the larger perspectives, to see beyond the group or the nation or the race, to see human beings as they really are with the image of God in them. Where seeing is dim, love becomes faint; and praise is lost for we praise only when first we have seen and loved. Man loses the praise of his creator which is the end of his existence and the source of his resting, seeing and loving."

This famous and hope-filled prayer sums up the 'wilderness experience', for which Christ was not only an exemplar of that resting, seeing, loving and praising, but also our true guide:

"Lord, you have made us for yourself – our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Help us to see with your eyes that seeing we may love and loving we may serve and know the peace of heaven where we shall see you face to face".

Amen.

