

Gingins, Holy Communion, Sun 18th Feb 2024

Gen 9:8-17

Mark 1:9-15

- Been to Senegal ?
 - o Senegalese wrestling ... must go, quite a spectacle
 - o Two men, not wearing much, face each other on sand arena; aim to wrestle other on to his back; whoever does that wins; can go on for long time, or be over in seconds
 - o Add in the heat, the excitement of the crowd, the smells, the sounds
- These are big guys
 - o I mean, you may think – looking around you in this congregation at Gingins – that we have some pretty impressive specimens of raw masculinity 😊 ...
 - o But these guys are magnificent ! Huge, strong, beautifully sculpted bodies, statuesque
 - o ... facing a test
- That's where we find Jesus today – facing a test
 - o Pretty existential test: 'who am I, what am I going to do – with my life, my mission?'
 - o At a tipping point, facing a decision

- We all face such tests at times, over big things or small things: will things work out as we hope
- Poem about the moment of decision, tipping point, saying the right thing, choosing the right path ...
- **"Sococim vs Pape Cargo (Dakar/Senegal)"**
 - o Picture them: weighing each other up, looking for an opening; for them, a physical tipping point; for us, maybe a decisive shift in our lives, our sense of being ...

*Turns on a moment:
The months you have spent
In mental preparation
Gathering of self
Feeling of energy,
Of intensity: focused, refracted
Into this encounter, this place.
Knowing the opportunity
Lies there
Waiting
The right move
Sensing the moment
Aware that the balance
Has subtly shifted
So, the time to move
To strike
Has come:*

But will you strike true?

Or else, for us ? ...The right word

With the right tone

At the right time

The right choice

To shift fate

To lead

Where it wants to go

Where it should go:

But will you say it right?

Will your choice be true?

This is your hope

This is your being

This is your passion

This is your truth

And you could end up

Flat on your back

Or living

The dream ...

- Jesus is out there, in the desert, facing just such a test
- Desert: real place, or a metaphor – could be his own inner space (our own inner space) wrestling with ‘who am I, and where am I going (what am I supposed to do, which path should I choose)?’
- The devil: real or metaphor – it could simply be that still small voice which whispers to him, to us, in the

middle of the night, weighing, chewing, stewing, maybe even agonising over options

- He has to make a decision, and he could end up ‘flat on his back’ ... or ‘living the dream’ (or maybe not ‘the dream’, but living the life that he is called to, following the star – however difficult – which it is his to follow.
- The version in Mark is a bit too brief. In Matthew there is more detail. These are the choices with which he is tested:
 - o ‘Turn these stones into bread’: am I going to follow path of dazzling people with magic tricks?’ ... he decides ‘no, ***I will be authentically human***’
 - o ‘Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple and God will save you’: am I going to depend on divine privilege and protection? ... he chooses ‘no, ***I will make myself vulnerable***’
 - o ‘Bow down and worship me, and I will give you power over all the kingdoms of the world’: am I going to achieve things by force, by might and by glory?’ ... he chooses ‘no, ***I will walk humbly***’ ...
- No doubt you find yourself asking sometimes “what should I do? What should I say? What should I decide?”
 - o Maybe about a role, a job, an activity, a relationship, a place to live, a country to move

to: do I stay or do I go, what should I do, should I make a change, or stay patiently where I am?

- The moment of indecision before choosing a particular action, or path, is often the most difficult, confusing ... can lead to deep anxiety for some ...
- These can be existential times of testing
- But they don't need to be big and existential, they can be more micro, in the moment
- There are two words used here: 'temptation' and 'testing'
- Some texts say 'Jesus is tempted ...'; some say 'Jesus is tested ...' in the wilderness
- Perhaps temptation is a kind of testing at micro-level, testing is more macro
- There are different translations of the Lord's Prayer: what we often say as 'lead us not into temptation' is better translated as "do not bring us to the time of trial, of testing"
- Temptation: can easily fall into caricature, thinking of minor peccadilloes, of 'do not's': eat that biscuit (trivial), drink that drink, try that forbidden fruit
 - 'Ooh am I going to be naughty and do that?'
 - I don't think God judges too much
- But we sense at another level the temptation to more serious things - let rip your anger, use your power not caring what it might mean for others, tear down rather

than build up, indulge petty prejudices rather than embrace a generosity of spirit

- Minor temptations can be a microcosm of the macro, of major existential tests - a displacement activity (I over-eat because I am not happy with where I am, who I am, what I should be doing with my life) ...
- ... seeking in something exterior a thing which you only find in yourself, in the choices you make about who to be, how to be
- I don't want to over-egg this
 - I don't mean you face that kind of existential crisis every time your hand hovers over the biscuit tin or you are tempted to pour yourself another glass of Chardonnay ... 😊
 - But you know what I mean ...
- What to do with all this? As we face decisions big or small, existential or trivial, potentially life-changing or apparently minor, tests or temptations ...
A few encouraging thoughts ...

1. Follow the **example of Jesus**

- *I will be authentically human*
- *I will make myself vulnerable*
- *I will walk humbly with my God*

2. **Look for the rainbow!**

- Noah passage (OT reading from Genesis: after the time of testing of the flood, God puts the rainbow in the sky

- Sign of promise, of hope!
- 'All will be will, and all manner of things shall be well' (Julian of Norwich)

2. **God gives strength and resources** not only to survive, but to live Life with hope and joy

- We have seen that when we pray 'lead us not into temptation' it is really a prayer to say 'do not bring us to the time of testing ...' but it doesn't stop there ...
- It is a prayer to God: 'do not bring us to the time of testing, ***without reminding us that you will give us the resources to cope***'
- So instead, it is not a prayer to stay sheltered in our comfort zones, but instead a prayer that God will remind us that He has got our backs: He will give us the necessary strength and resources
 - o We've chosen a hymn which we will sing later which expresses that: 'We Rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender ...'
 - o It's beautiful, it makes me cry, we sang it at my aunt's funeral just two weeks ago, and it's profoundly true
 - o '... strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender'
- And that can allow us 'to take up arms against a sea of troubles', a plethora of adversities
- to be bold (*to boldly go, in the words of the famous Star Trek split infinitive 😊*)

- Another hymn we will sing, 'Father Hear the Prayer we Offer', encourages us to choose boldly ...
- '... not for ease that prayer shall be, but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously ...'
- Not forever in green pastures do we ask our way to be, ... nor by still waters ... but treading the steep and rugged pathway rejoicingly, and smiting a few living fountains from the rocks along the way' !

3. In some ways, **it doesn't matter** ... what you decide or do

- Martin Luther famously wrote 'sin boldly ...'
- It needs some unpacking, but (briefly) the point is that God is a God of grace; you may not know, not be able to decide, what is the right course, right choice
 - o What to do, who to love, where to be, whether to do or not to do, to be or not to be ...
 - o But – whatever you may decide to do, not knowing if it is 'right' or 'wrong' – do it boldly, knowing that God loves you and is kind and merciful and forgiving and loves me with a 'love that wilt not let me go' (another hymn)

4. It doesn't matter what you do, but ... **it does matter** in the sense that

- ... just as Jesus struggled with 'who am I and where am I going'
- We must be true to ourselves

- So, take the time to know ourselves, to be honest with what enables me to be the person who God made me to be, because that is what God wants for us
- Which means taking the time for the inner journey
- ... to know ourselves, who we are
- ... and therefore, where we might go with our lives

5. Finally, **enjoy and be hopeful!** God is not a God of the 'do nots', but **a God of grace**

- Test, temptation and choices are not about protecting ourselves from misdemeanours and pitfalls, but about celebrating, enjoying and loving Life, tasting the goodness of the World, of people, of new experiences, places, ways of being, delighting in the love and the laughter and the beauty and richness
- Therefore : 'taste, eat, see that it is good!' ...
- ... as we continue to discover: Who we are, and where we are going.
- Amen.