

220226 'Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' (Matthew 4:1-3)

Believe it or not, I have been here at St Marc's for 11 months now.

It has been a time where I have done much observing and a lot of thinking as to how we can take this church forward and grow it.

If we are not interested in taking the church forward, then we have to ask ourselves:
'What are we doing here'.

It is an interesting challenge.

To do what I would like to do, and to advance the church as we would hope, would normally take 7-8 years to achieve in England, where there are plenty of fish to catch.

My contract is for three years initially in a foreign land with limited resources.

Impossible right?

Well, not so fast. Today, we are at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

In three years, Jesus transformed the world through his life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven to rule the world from there.

Three years is not a long time.

To be honest, an initial three years of ministry is about the only thing I have in common with Jesus; in every other respect, I am not worthy.

All that said, there have been some interesting developments going on in this church recently.

Much of the time I have spent observing what happens here, considering what might be necessary to keep and to change.

The interaction between church members is an important consideration and then there is the question of how the church functions, who does what and how we can work together to the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom in this part of the world.

About a month ago, it was suggested the council had a 'Vision meeting', to see if we could discern what the Lord was calling us to do.

Two weeks ago, we set the date and we had that meeting last weekend.

It was a very good meeting and there was a moment, all of a sudden, when I felt that all of us were pulling in the same way with the help of the Spirit.

I will be finishing writing up the minutes of it all this week, but what we finished with was considering a new vision and a new direction for St Marc's, which consists of five things to aim to do:

Screen:

A New Vision:

1. A Culture of Invitation
2. A Culture of Welcome
3. A Culture of Servanthood in Christ
4. A Culture of Giving
5. A Culture of Thanks and Praise

I want to talk about the first of these in a moment, but you may be asking:

‘What has any of this to do with our readings?’

The answer is quite a lot in the case of our gospel reading of Jesus temptation in the wilderness.

Jesus was setting out to start his public ministry.

In our passage we see quite clearly that he did not just decide to pick up his staff and start wandering from town to town in the hope of picking up a few odd people to follow him.

No, we note:

‘Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.’

In other words, he began by seeking the will of the Father, who, through the Holy Spirit, led Jesus to align his human nature with his divine nature in resisting his greatest adversary.

Other strengths in Jesus’ armoury included: not living

‘on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’; challenging his opponent with that word:

‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test’ which led to the victorious

‘For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”’

We also note that he did not do this without preparation.

Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights, because the task ahead would be hard and Jesus needed to be ready to counter the wiles of the tempter.

This would take spiritual discipline and discipline is proved in overcoming difficult tasks.

The secret is to keep the Lord in your sight, no matter what the world might throw at you.

There is also opposition, difficulty and danger:

‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’;

'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."';

'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'

The glory comes though, when we: **Worship** the Lord your God, and serve him only.'

Taking into account all that, we pass to the first of our challenges:

Bringing about in our church, 'A Culture of Invitation'.
What does this mean?

Put very simply, the only way any church is going to grow is if existing members invite other people to come along and join us.

We cannot magic more people to come, we need to extend an invitation to others outside of our church circle to come.

We see this example in the way the disciples and others did this.

For instance: Philip with Nathanael;
the Samaritan woman by the well;
and Philip again with the Ethiopian.

Jesus and the disciples went from place to place inviting people to come and hear the Good news.

Now the thing here was that there was an intentionality about this.

The kingdom was to be proclaimed;
the harvest was great, but the labourers were few.

Even so following Jesus became a thing and many did follow him to the cross and then beyond.

This is our task and in the weeks and months to come I will be encouraging to think differently about how we might gather more followers for Christ here at St Marc's.

The danger is, of course, as has happened to many a venture beforehand, that saying we need to do this is one thing.

Doing it is another.

I felt at our meeting last Saturday, as I sense did others that something different is happening with this discussion we had.

It must not become one of those 'Let's do it' exercises that before you know it ends up as another set of plans in the darkness of a drawer, never again to see the light of day.

We must bring the light.

It may seem daunting, but the Lord desires it.

The thing is, he needs help, and that is you and me working with him in the Spirit to bring more people from darkness to light.

All of us can and must play a part to bring members of our own community to be one in the Lord's community.

We need to pray about this and act on it.

If we do, then the Lord will do the rest and the glory will be his.