

Sunday 17th March 2019

Worship in the Wilderness - A Simple Journey

This week we looked at three aspects of wilderness worship that Jesus engaged in.

1) Solitude

Jesus often spent time alone.

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:15-16)

We might have different responses to the idea of solitude. Some of us will be very scared of spending time alone others of us will think that this sounds like a great idea - finally, a bit of privacy; a bit of peace!

“solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather, it is the place of conversion, a place where the old self dies and the new self is born... In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract... We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with him and him alone.” Henri Nouwen, *The Way of The Heart*, p. 27, 30.

The main reason Jesus sought solitude was to be with his heavenly Father.

Q. Is it possible to spend some moments each week with no agenda but to be with God? What makes this difficult for you?

Q How can we see time alone as a place of transformation, where we are changed to relate to the world in a new and more godly way? Imagine how this might affect you personally.

2) Simplicity

Jesus rejects unnecessary baggage. Jesus knows it is so easy to “gain the world” yet “lose your soul” (Luke 9:25),

Q The advertisements around us every day aim to tempt us to consume more. Consider honestly how often you are tempted to buy more clothes, or upgrade to a better gadget, or invest in a bigger car?

Jesus was a homeless man (Luke 9:58). His only possessions seem to have been one set of clothes (John 19:23). When he sends out the 72 in Luke 10, he tells them: “Do not take a purse or bag or sandals” (10:4). It is not wrong for us to have homes, clothes and other possessions, but

Q. Do we need quite as many things as the adverts tell us we do? How might you counter this influencing?

Wilderness worship might ask us to consider whether we rely too much on things - even good things - instead of trusting in God. Maybe walking away from our warm homes and taking a prayer hike through the woods might help you see God afresh. Perhaps putting your smartphone away for a day might give you a new perspective on life and faith. Maybe turning off the music and the radio, sitting

silently in God's presence, might be a form of simple, wilderness worship that restores your soul more than you realise.

3) Fasting

This leads us on to one of the most obvious things about Jesus' time in the wilderness - the fact that he fasted from food. The first temptation attacks this directly:

"The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'" (Luke 5:3)

Fasting is not about showing people how spiritual we are, or guilt-tripping God into answering our prayers. It reminds us that, more than food, our lives are sustained by the word of God

Now, literal fasting from food continued through the time of Jesus and into the early church (Matt. 9:15, Acts 13:2). It may be that during this Lent season you choose to give up some meal times, and to spend the time you would have been eating in prayer with God.

But there are also other types of fast we can do.

- Isaiah 58:6 talks about a fast where people choose to put injustice right.
- 1 Corinthians 7:5 describes a fast where married couples refrain from physical intimacy for a time in order to focus on praying. These two things should show us that we can fast in other ways than from food.

Q. Where are you in danger of getting your identity from, instead of God? Is it your social media account? The kinds of clothes you wear? Eating at particular restaurants?

Q. Identify the thing that you most rely on? With that in mind consider how you could you "fast" in a positive way using the examples from scripture; perhaps by helping a homeless person, befriending someone who is lonely, or standing up for a mistreated person at work?