

The Kingdom of God is within you

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Lent 1

Introduction

Today is the first Sunday in Lent and the theme is: 'Worship and serve only God.' It's that period in the Church year, when we are led by the Holy Spirit, who came to us at our baptism, back into the wilderness of spiritual re-evaluation, doubt, and inner conflict.

Some time ago, Susan Maushart (Weekend Australian 24th-25th February 2007) wrote: *'What is fundamentalism, whether of the religious variety or the strenuously secular sort, but a toxic deficit of doubt...Perhaps doubt is like cholesterol There's the good kind, and the bad kind. Bad doubt clogs the arteries of inquiry. It does not engage. It deflects, refusing to get off complacency's couch. Good doubt is pro-active. It doesn't just wait to see if problems arise. It assumes they will – like dandelions'*

So, as pro-active doubters in the line of Jesus and Thomas, we prepare ourselves to renew our baptism, our passing from death to life, to say once more "Yes" to life. One way we might do this by denying ourselves something we ordinarily take for granted, or by doing something extra, which we believe will benefit someone else. Maybe using the money we'd have spent on a block of chocolate or other little luxuries, to give to those who really need it. We could give to fellow Australians suffering amidst the devastation of floods in our eastern states, or to Ukrainians suffering the even worse devastation of war, where people take their families to safety then turn

back to fight for their country. Then again, we might invite someone to dinner rather than watch TV of an evening.

Whatever we do, we soon see that making even so small a change invites conflict. We find ourselves reaching into our own depths to find what we value most and examining and then grappling with motives: we expose ourselves to temptation. However, we do this in the power of the Christ within. We bring into this time and place the forty days he spent in the wilderness immediately following his baptism by John.

Luke 4:1-15

What Jesus showed us in the wilderness was how to hammer out, how to become clear, about those spiritual guidelines that will inform how we'll think and in accordance with which we'll try to act. This is construction work – the construction of identity, of character. Just as the people of Israel did it as they wandered in the wilderness. Just as Jesus did it in the wilderness, we're doing it. Constructing, creating from the scriptures what it means to be born of God. Beginning with: who am I? A child of God. Then it follows that I may worship and serve only God. When we do this, we're walking in the Kingdom, the Promised Land.

Within the Kingdom of God, we each create a self we can live with. The word of God, 'be doers and not hearers only', is more important even than food. We can be honest about our beginnings for after all we have no influence over the circumstances into which we were born: 'a wandering Aramean was my ancestor' or Jesus was the son, as was thought, of Joseph, son of Heli, and so on.

We can be honest about our troubles and ultimate dependence on God 'we cried to the Lord' and 'the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness'. God not only lifts up the lowly but fills the hungry with good things.

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humility then is more important to us than personal power and authority.

Within the Kingdom, the worship of God, being a servant of God in humility, is more important to us than ego, and truth more important than any outward show of power. By not accepting without question even scripture, used duplicitously by one intent on amassing power to dominate, Jesus, in spite of extreme hunger, withstood the temptation to deny his calling.

As President Volodymyr Zelensky said in response to President Vladimir Putin's national address: *'We don't have time for lengthy history lectures. I am not going to talk about the past. Let me tell you about the present and the future...(the) truth is that this is our land, our country, and our children and we will defend all of this.'*

When we have such faith that we can doubt, question, wrestle, accept, then we see how God works in and through us, particular persons with particular characteristics. We become who we are called to be as persons and a people. And that is worship in spirit and truth.