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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : First Sunday of Lent
Sunday 6th March 2021

LENT 1 2022

Small things can make all the difference – and some need to be quickly dealt with:

- A car windscreen has a tiny pin head of a chip; the cold weather comes and crack – result: a whole new windscreen and pay the excess.
- A tear in a shirt can easily get bigger.
- One patch of moss in the lawn, if left untreated, soon spreads.
- One tile off the roof can lead to more serious damage...and so on.

There are other examples of where small mistakes make a huge difference:

- There was the version of the Bible where they omitted the word NOT from one of the commandments – so it read “Thou shalt steal”.
- Alan Bennett tells the story of the headstone requested “she was THINE”. What was actually carved was “she was thin”. ‘You’ve missed out the “E”’, protested the customer. “EE she was thin” came back the carving.
- Glory to God in the highest – somebody covered up the ‘e’ which made it ‘Glory to God in the High Street’

Yes, small things can make all the difference. It was Desmond Tutu who said *“Do your small bit of good where you are. It’s those small bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”*

So it is that, as we begin the season of Lent, we are encouraged to take care of the small things in our lives so that they don't grow and become bigger. Lent provides us with that golden opportunity to become stronger – by giving things up or taking something extra on, by being more disciplined. And by waiting. Waiting for our observances of Holy Week and Easter.

Waiting was of course the theme word for Jesus as he waited in the desert. Yet for at least some of the time he was not alone – Satan, the tempter, the devil accompanied him. It is quite an eye-opener to watch Jesus in action dealing with this intruder. For Jesus, of course, as Luke relates them, the temptations are very powerful. But Jesus holds onto the secure promises of God and doesn't let them go, even in the face of Satan's grip. Jesus was tempted to turn the stones into bread so that he could eat them – but he instinctively knew that this would be using his power in a selfish way. His love for God and other people was far bigger than the temptation and so he was able to stand firm and not let the temptation get the better of him.

One thing Jesus doesn't do is to enter into an argument with the devil. He would lose, because temptations are always cleverly constructed and entirely logical, with enough truth in them to make them appear plausible. What Jesus does is to recognise the motive under the scheming and address this instead. He holds firmly onto the secure and certain promises of God.

For us, our temptations today can often be no different. All too often we can find ourselves being drawn into the devil's arguments. Contrary to what the devil tells us, temptation can be resisted and overcome. So, in computing terms, we each need to install a robust firewall between sin and us, a suit of armour, if you like, to protect us!

You see God knows exactly what each of us can go through – for we must never forget that when God wished to demonstrate what a citizen of his Kingdom should be, he became one of us and lived among us. God in Christ lived according to his own laws, for he declared that it was not enough to talk about the truth, you have to live it. One of the greatest things we may notice about God is that he never

demands from any human being what he is not prepared to do and give himself – for actions speak louder than words.

This is illustrated by a familiar fable by Aesop. *“There was an exceedingly clever cat and the mice were so plagued by her at every turn that they called a mice court to advise upon some way to prevent their being surprised. One member of the court cleverly suggested ‘If you take my advice, there is nothing like hanging a bell round the cat’s neck to give warning beforehand when she’s coming’. They all agreed that this suggestion was quite the best solution to their problem. ‘That’s fine’ said another mouse ‘now who exactly is going to hang the bell round the cat’s neck?’”*

The boldest talkers are not always the greatest doers – for us the actions of God through Jesus in the wilderness in his confrontations with the devil speak to us, even today, much louder than any words. Let us hold that thought before us as we go about our daily lives during these 40 days that make up this season of waiting which is called Lent.