

## SERMON – 22 FEBURARY 2026

We've probably all got our own memorable gospel story. This week's is one of mine. Particularly the bit where the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain. There's something a bit magical being up on a mountain and looking down at the world below. Not sure where it is the devil chose – perhaps Mount Tabor where the Transfiguration took place, or even the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, though perhaps not as this isn't really a 'high' mountain. Had Jesus been alive now, the devil would have probably taken him for a ride in a helicopter over somewhere like London.

Before we go on, it's worth just taking note of the first verse of this gospel reading: 'Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.' I hadn't remembered that bit about this gospel passage. It wasn't just that the devil happened to come by Jesus. No, the Spirit 'arranged' this strange encounter. Why.... To indicate clearly that Jesus was totally one of us even to being tempted.

The devil says to Jesus: 'All this I will give you, if you bow down and worship me.' The answer from Jesus is direct: 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord our God, and serve him only.'

Who does Satan think he is claiming he 'owns' the whole world? Sounds a bit like Trump offering Greenland to Jesus! Jesus doesn't challenge him on this. Doesn't say: 'Anyway, It's not yours, it's mine' or 'It belongs to my Father'. Jesus knew that there was absolutely no point in getting into a debate with the devil.

The encounter raises the whole thing of ownership. Certain political leaders, as we know, are currently obsessed by wanting to 'own' that which is not theirs. Jesus could have responded to the devil's question by saying: 'Actually the world belongs not to you, neither in fact to me, but to each and every person and creature who inhabits it. At the beginning of creation my father made that gift.

This then is the gospel reading given to us for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent. My own google search suggests that Lent was invented in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century and something to do with the Council of Nicaea. Looks as if the 40 days bit came from today's gospel following Jesus's 40 days of fasting.

Lent is a time for us in prayer and silence to come closer to our inner being and to God. It is a time for us to look at our relationship with the world we live in. What do we mean when we say 'something is mine'? We are invited to tread lightly in this world, treating it with love and respect precisely because it is not 'mine'.

Traditionally, some people give up things for lent e.g. alcohol, sweets. Perhaps for us all it is also a time to look at things we find ourselves overly attached to and see if we can find ways to redress the balance. Are we overly attached to social media to the detriment of people around us? Are we too possessive of our time, so are slow to open

to God, or indeed other people or even ourselves? Are we so attached to our possessions and wealth that we see it all as our only security and exclude others from it? How are we about money – the route of all evil. Epstein was largely about a gang of wealthy men wanting to screw others to become wealthier. Lent is a time to reflect and se-set all of this and to have a ‘healthy’ distance in our soul from what ‘belongs to us’. Jesus warned us of the guy who built up his storage of grain so as to have no more worries. He decided he was going to eat, drink and be merry. But the Lord had other ideas and he died that very night!

The devil’s kind offer to Jesus to hand over possession of the whole world to him can be a useful nudge to us to question what we mean by ‘possession’ and whether we need to look again at who really owns what.

When I read through my sermon notes, I feared that my words sounded full of doom and gloom! Lent is a happy time. Happiness comes as a result of looking at ourselves, smiling at what we see, then shifting gear as we await the Lord’s resurrection.