



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

Date 24th February, 2023

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
Matthew 26:41

This week has seen Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday, words and 'holy days' associated with repentance and forgiveness, leading into the 40 days of Lent. (The word 'lent', from Old English 'lencten', just meant 'spring', and the lengthening of days.)

Lent focuses on the 40 days of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as a microcosm of the whole of his life and ministry, which was, for him, a wilderness journey, because he left his Father's throne in glory to identify with fallen humanity. As Paul wrote in Philippians 2, he *"did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!"*

So Lent invites us to stay with our Lord in his life and work, by self-denial seeking to empathise with him -as far as we can- through this journey of humility, obedience and suffering, and some Christians give something up for Lent as a way of identifying with Jesus' humanness, sufferings and temptations. There were four specific temptations of Jesus in the gospels, three in the 4th chapters of Matthew and Luke, and one later. Although we can hardly compare our own temptations with his, they are on familiar battle grounds:

Physical needs... food, drink, sleep, etc. (*"...tell this stone to become bread."* Luke 4:3)

Spiritual needs... worship, identity, belonging, etc. (*"If you worship me, it will all be yours."* Luke 4:7)

Emotional needs... relationship, self-worth, confidence in faith, etc. (*"...throw yourself down ...He will... guard you!"* Luke 4:9-10)

The *last* temptation of Christ (remember the film of that title?) is the one hurled at him as he was dying: *"Come down from the cross"* (Matthew 27:40-43). He could have done so; he could have evaded his sufferings at any stage (Matthew 26:53).

A few hours before the cross, Jesus had said to the three disciples in Gethsemane, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."* (Matthew 26:38). It was less than 24 hours before his death, but I wonder whether the plea of Jesus, if we may so call it, is still to you and me. In his hour of loneliness with horrific death before him, he says to us, *"Stay here and keep watch with me."* –as if he *needs* us to do that! (It is, surely, all we can offer towards the means of our salvation.)

So Lent is a period when we turn down the volume of distractions to find some 'different' time with Jesus. And there are other words from Gethsemane which may be for us: Jesus says, *"Could you not watch with me one hour? ... Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."* (Matthew 26:40-41)

May God bless you through Lent.