



# Sunday Reflection

## Season of Lent

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 21 February 2021

# Lent 1

As we come to worship in these first days of Lent, we offer our lives afresh to the Lord, who promises to be with us and sustain us by the Spirit through whatever lies ahead. Jesus has defeated every power that opposes God's rule.  
Let us praise God.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'"**

*Mark 1:11*

### An Illustration to set the scene

"**J J DID TIE BUCKLE**" is an odd sentence, but its wording is significant.

The sentence is an acronym, where each letter stands for a word that needs to be remembered.

This acronym was devised for the United States Marine Corps, and it helps marines to keep in mind the fourteen traits of their leadership: **justice, judgement, dependability, initiative, decisiveness, tact, integrity, enthusiasm, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty and endurance.**

It's quite a list. No wonder someone devised an acronym as a way of recalling everything on it.

Most of us would affirm the value of all those qualities. Business leadership models tend to place greater emphasis on the need for teamworking, highlighting skills such as delegation, empathy and capacity to inspire, alongside vision, creativity and flexibility.

How would Jesus' leadership match these qualities? They are all virtuous traits, and perhaps what makes Jesus' leadership distinctive is that we see these qualities in his life as well as his words. But there is a deeper distinguishing factor in Jesus' leadership – his mission springs out of and remains dependent upon his heavenly Father, to whom he gives all the glory.

### **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

Within the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel, the adult Jesus emerges from the unremarkable village of Nazareth to be baptised by John at the River Jordan. Mark's narrative sets an urgent pace, with no lingering over details. It goes to the heart of the drama: the clash of the kingdoms of light and darkness, with Jesus in the midst.

Jesus has opened up the pathway and removed all the obstacles that lie between us and God's kingdom, enabling us to follow him as Lord into life with God for ever. Mark's intense, action-packed scenes offer insights into how God's kingdom advances as he presents Jesus' distinctive servant-leadership.

As Jesus is baptised heaven opens up to resound with God's voice, expressing deep delight in the beloved Son. Yet this is before Jesus' public ministry has begun. Human beings tend to approve of others because of what they have achieved. Here, Jesus is cherished not for what he has done, but for who he is in relationship to the Father. Jesus is no self-sufficient military

leader, nor an ambitious business executive: he is fundamentally a beloved Son.

We might assume that God's commendation and the Spirit's anointing would lead Jesus straight into proclaiming God's kingdom. Instead, the Spirit drives him into the wilderness. Jesus is brought face to face with danger in wild and dark places. Far from being an escape, the Spirit's anointing has equipped him to encounter such vulnerability in faith. Jesus' obedience is honed under opposition and temptation, away from the limelight. When he returns to Galilee, this undergirds the clarity, authority and integrity of his kingdom call to repentance and baptism.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

As we seek to serve our master we may be tempted to set store by what we do and have achieved – whether it's spending hours in prayer, or what we know, or our qualifications and status.

Yet the power and energy to minister come from God's Spirit, and the capacity to go beyond ourselves comes from knowing that we are loved as God's children.

Jesus moves forward, knowing he is fully accepted, beloved of the Father. God's gaze upon us is as full of love for us as it is at the sight of Jesus. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more; nothing we can do to make God love us less. Receiving this truth paradoxically only strengthens our desire to serve our Saviour.

Perhaps you have had an intense experience of God coming close that has been followed by challenging and difficult times. If so, you need not be alarmed. Being in the wilderness is not a punishment. Like Jesus, we may be exposed to temptation's pull,

but we are not alone. Angels are sent to be alongside, not to take away our struggles but to sustain us through them. God never leaves us.

As we walk in faith through temptation and danger, we can emerge more grounded and mature in Christ, our trust in him deepened through the darkness. As we return to lighter times, we will discover a new resonance and authenticity in our testimony of God's faithfulness.

**"And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'"**

*Mark 1:11*

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**