



# Sunday Reflection

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



For Sunday 18 February 2024

# Lent 1

## The Rector will preach at both Charges:-

The Holy Spirit, who drove Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism, guides and inspires us today. As we open our hearts in prayer and praise, let us ask for grace to experience the kingdom of God this Lent.

*"And he was with the wild beasts." Mark 1:13*

### An illustration to set the scene

The painting is finished.

Alongside it on the easel is a photograph, taken on a summer's evening, which helped the painter reproduce a moment of light on the coast of Mull towards the mainland.

The light in the painting is magical and it reflects the sense of wonder that the painter felt on that special evening.

Many of the stories that appear in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels are based on those in Mark's Gospel. .... So it would be tempting to see the three events in our reading today as "photographs" from which Matthew and Luke "painted" their Gospels – tempting, but wrong.

The difficulty when reading Mark is to banish our memories of Matthew and Luke and to read Mark as something new and fresh, challenging and demanding.

Reading Mark requires that we pay special attention to the context and the sequence of events in his narrative.

### **Today's Gospel teaching**

The context to our reading today is the ministry of John the Baptist, a man of the wilderness, and his call to baptism as a sign of repentance.

John proclaims the coming of "**one who is more powerful than I**", who will "**baptise you with the Holy Spirit**".

St Mark deals with the important subjects of **affirmation, formation and proclamation**.

He tells us that Jesus comes from Nazareth and is baptised by John in the Jordan.

As Jesus comes out of the water, the heavens are torn apart and the Holy Spirit rests upon him.

Jesus hears a voice from heaven affirming that he is God's beloved Son and that God is "**well pleased**" with him.

This is an intensely personal moment, for only Jesus sees the Spirit descend upon him and only Jesus hears the voice from heaven.

It is an uplifting moment of divine affirmation, but it does not last.

Immediately the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness, to face temptation among the wild beasts and to be waited upon by angels.

Now, as then, the wilderness is not something far away. It sits on the edge of towns and settlements – the wilderness is ever-present.

Biblically, it is a place of darkness, evil spirits, wild animals and fear.

Yet it is in the wilderness that God transforms a wandering band of refugees into the people of Israel, and emboldens the prophet Elijah to be strong in doing God's will.

**In the wilderness, Jesus is formed.** He is given the message and ministry of the Son of God who strides through Mark's Gospel.

**In the wilderness the kingdom of God comes close to Jesus.**

**How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?**

The penitence leading to Jesus' baptism and affirmation and his wilderness experience shape his proclamation.

**Jesus' message is that the time promised by John has come and the kingdom of God has come near.**

The response to this good news is to *repent and believe – turn to God and believe – change our minds and believe.*

Lent is a time of **personal exploration, growth and discovery**, during which we are called to allow ourselves, in a spirit of penitence (being prepared to change our minds), to be led by the Holy Spirit.

In the wilderness, *among the wild beasts*, Jesus experiences the kingdom of God and later proclaims that the kingdom of God **has come near**.

We are called to echo that proclamation in word and deed, but how can we if we have no experience of that kingdom to draw on?

That same Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism **leads us today, if we are open and willing**.

While the wilderness is not on our doorsteps, the natural world – the world of God's making – is all around us.

Since moving here to make my life in Scotland I have enjoyed exploring the National Trust for Scotland properties and I am reminded of a trip to an English National Trust's garden at Hidcote in Gloucestershire which has a "**Silent Space**" that invites visitors to "**disconnect from the outside world and reconnect with nature**".

It is part of a worldwide network of such spaces.

There may be a special place that is your *silent space* near you, or you may have a natural space that is balm to your soul. Like when I go camping on the shore's of Loch Lomond.

However or wherever you go about it, make it a **priority** this Lent to let the Holy Spirit lead you somewhere you can be still and wait,  
allowing nature to transform you,  
turning away from doing,  
concentrating on being  
– somewhere you can glimpse the divine and where the kingdom of God can find you and come near to you.

*"And he was with the wild beasts." Mark 1:13*

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