

Welcome to our podcast today,

At this the beginning of the season of Lent

Lent is the 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter when the church reflects on the life,

passion

and suffering of Jesus.

(pause)

We begin that journey today reading the story of Jesus temptation in the desert.

We are reading it in Marks gospel which is a much shorter version than the other gospels

So here as Jesus ministry begins in the wilderness for 40 days, we know it ends on the cross

Reading from Mark chapter 1.9 to verse 15

I'm reading from the Good News Translation of the bible.

Not long afterward Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you." 12 At once the Spirit made him go into the desert, 13 where he stayed forty days, being tempted by Satan. Wild animals were there also, but angels came and helped him. 14 After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. 15 "The right time has come," he said, "and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!"

Sermon

How long can you pray for.

For most of us it's just a few minutes.

We get distracted.

We hear the noise of the wind.

We start thinking about what we're going to have for tea.

What we need to buy at the shops.

Sitting still and praying is beyond most of us.

Muslims pray 5 times a day.

Christians are lucky if it's even once.

Why?

Why don't we take our faith and the practise of our religion as seriously as do people of other faiths.

Muslims also have a big festival of fasting,

Ramadan

That so many take so seriously.

Not eating from sunrise to sunset for a month
– 29 to 30 days.

(pause)

This week saw the start of Lent the nearest equivalent for Christians to Ramdan

A time of fasting and prayer.

A time to prepare for Jesus death on a cross.

A time to get ready to celebrate his resurrection.

(pause)

But what kind of fasting do most of us do.

Giving up chocolate.

Is that really so hard for us as adults,

it would be for a child.

Is that really so much of a sacrifice for us.

(pause)

Lent is not something we really do within our particular church tradition.

It's much more of a Roman Catholic or Orthodox thing.

Protestants don't really celebrate Lent.

But we should.

It might help us in our spiritual life if we took seriously periods like this.

As a time to pray.

A time to reflect.

As a time to prepare.

(pause)

Lent is based on this period of time that Jesus spent in the desert.

The 40 days and nights he spent preparing for his journey to the cross.

The 40 days and 40 nights that he spent being tempted by the Devil

as he tried to pray,

as he tried to get even closer to God than he already was.

(pause)

And for us it should be a time to reflect on Jesus cross and really understand it.

To reflect on the cross and give thanks that Jesus died for me.

To reflect on the cross and what it means for me to die to myself.

To reflect on the cross and what sacrifices God is calling each one of us to make.

(pause)

Ramadan is a time of spiritual reflection,
and increased devotion and worship.

Muslims are expected to put more effort into following and understanding the teachings of Islam during this time.

The same could be said for Lent but as Christians we don't put nearly so much into it.

This should be a time when we reflect on all that Jesus has done for us.

What his death on a cross really means for us.

It should be a time when we stop and think about our faith

And reflect on how great God is,

On how much He loves us

And what our response to His love is.

(pause)

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert,

At once the Spirit made him go into the desert, where he stayed forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Mark 1.12 and 13

This is meant to echo the forty days Moses spent fasting while writing the covenant for the people of Israel

and it also is reminiscent of the forty years the Israelites spent in the desert experiencing their own temptations.

40 days is not meant to necessarily be taken literally.

It's a number that signifies a long time.

(pause)

Jesus is wrestling with the problem of how to bring people back to following God.

He is struggling with what he needs to do to make it possible for the people to come close to God once more.

Satan, the devil, shows him one way.

The easy or quick way.

Jesus knows that he needs to take the hard way.

He knows that he needs to go the way of the cross.

And he's preparing himself to start that journey.

Preparing himself to do what he needs to do in these last years of his life

(pause)

We've promised to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

And in these 40 days of Lent we prepare ourselves to take up our cross.

We prepare ourselves to face the sacrifices that God calls us to make in our lives as disciples.

We get ourselves ready to die to self.

To die along with Jesus.

(pause)

Lent is the time that we prepare ourselves for the cross.

And reflect on Jesus journey and our own.

(pause)

God wants Jesus to go the hard way.

The way of the cross.

Not take the easy way that the devil is offering Him.

And he is saying to us we need to go the way of the cross.

Jesus is showing us the way we need to go.

And even though that way might sometimes be hard

We need to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

(pause)

The Spirit was with Jesus throughout these 40 days and 40 nights.

The Spirit will be with us in all the temptations that we face.

In the trials and suffering that we experience in life.

(pause)

And the Spirit will be with us in the 40 days ahead.

In this time of Lent

As we prepare for the death of Jesus on the cross.

And as we take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Amen.

Prayer

Father we find the picture of Jesus out in a desert for 40 days a hard one.

What did he eat? What did he drink?

How did he get on, on his own without friends or family?

(pause)

We know that it was a hard time for him Father as he was tempted.

Tempted to stop believing in you,

to stop trusting in you.

(pause)

Father there are times in our lives when we find things to be hard.

We feel all alone. We don't feel close to you.

We are tempted to give up on our faith.

Help us to keep faith Father.

To not give up believing in you and trusting in you.

May we like Jesus be strengthened in our faith by the help of angels.

May we be led by your Spirit day by day and know that we are always safe in your loving arms.

(pause)

Father we want to come close to you as you come close to us.

We want to pray.

We want to sit in silent meditation and feel
your Spirit enfolding us.

But we find it so hard Father.

So hard to have the discipline of prayer.

We get so easily distracted Father.

Help us Father to sit silently now in
contemplation.

Help us to sit in quietness.

And to know your Spirit stilling our busy,
distracted minds.

(long pause)

Father during this season of Lent may we
make the time to pray.

May we have the time to read your word.

May we understand in a deeper way what Jesus' death and resurrection means for us.

And as we pray may we also clearly hear your voice speaking to us and not the voice of the devil.

May we know the leading of your Spirit in our lives and not succumb to the many temptations that face us.

(pause)

as we enter this season of Lent help us to take up our crosses, and follow Jesus wherever he leads us.

Help us to walk together on that journey to the foot of the cross.

To die to ourselves,

and to live for you.

In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**