



Downing Place United Reformed Church

Lent Bible Studies 2021

Week 1.

1 What does Lent mean for a member of the United Reformed Church?

Lent began as a fast before Easter, originally for two or three days, later expanded to forty days by the Council of Nicaea (325CE). It was possibly modelled on Jesus in the Temptation narrative (Mk1:13 & parallels), also the customary period before baptism (at Easter); and did not involve complete abstinence from food – rather just one meal a day, with no meat or eggs. The BCP of 1549 retained fasting, as did BCP 1662; but the Puritans abolished many feasts and fasts (including Christmas under Cromwell) and their successors after ejection did not formally restore them (though fasting usually preceded the call and ordination of a new minister). In 18C the CoE became very lax, but the practice was revived in 19C by the Oxford Movement. In 20C the practice was revived by some of the Free Churches too. But often focused on increased devotion – prayer, spiritual reading ('Lent Books'), and sometimes special services.

2 What are the aims of this course of Bible readings?

I have selected six passages from Mark (the Lectionary Gospel for 2020-21), beginning with the Temptation, which in Mark is very short; and then three further passages around Jesus's three predictions of his suffering and death, with the aim of seeing if and how they relate to the three temptations in Matthew & Luke, followed by the stories of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and the Cleansing of the Temple. They all mark key moments in Jesus' ministry, all misunderstood, misinterpreted or not believed by his disciples.

NB The synoptic gospels each assume that Jesus' ministry lasted one year, unlike John, who assumed it lasted three years, the chronology we generally assume today. (Why?)

3 Text

(Mark 1:12-13) And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited upon him.

4 Comments and questions

The wilderness is very close to the cultivated areas of Palestine, so it would be a familiar experience for the first hearers of this Gospel. What is its significance in the story? Why do you suppose 'the wild beasts' are mentioned? What is the significance of 'the angels'? Do you think the fact or the content of the temptations is more significant?