

## Sermon: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent B: Genesis 9.8-17; I Peter 3.18-22; Mark 1.9-15

Today we begin to journey with Jesus in the wilderness through the forty days of Lent. Many of us will be feeling that we have been in the wilderness for quite a long time now. But around the world, many more people are experiencing an even greater wilderness with the effects of climate change. Some people are experiencing enormous floods like the one in Noah's time that we heard about in our first reading. Other people are experiencing prolonged drought. Today, as well as being the first Sunday in Lent, we are marking Climate Sunday. And as part of that, I would like to invite you to watch a short film from Tearfund about a woman called Orbisa who lives in northern Ethiopia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXuEkAtZLi8>

In Lent we spend a bit more time thinking about our sinfulness. The things that we have done wrong or the things that we haven't done that we should have. And we tend to think in terms of our individual sins. We might decide to give up chocolate or alcohol. And there's nothing wrong with that. But we're also aware that sin isn't just an individual thing. As human beings we share in the sins of the world. And one of the greatest sins of our time is the damage we are doing to our planet and the impact it is having on nature and on the poor. And perhaps that's something we need to spend a bit more time with this Lent. Thinking about the bigger picture and our part in it.

Like Orbisa, Jesus knew what it was to go without water. Without food. We're told that the devil tempted him, and in other versions of the story Jesus was tempted to make bread out of stones; to put God to the test by throwing himself off the temple; and to take power over the nations. Jesus could have done any of these things but he didn't. He resisted temptation. Because we live in a rich part of the world which hasn't suffered as much from climate change we may be tempted to ignore it. To do what we want and let other people deal with the consequences. People in other countries. Generations still to come. But as followers of Jesus we are called to do more than that. To repent and change.

It's easy for us to feel powerlessness in the face of climate change. It is such a huge issue. But we are not powerless. As the film said, we can pray, we can campaign. And we can act. Even though this is a worldwide issue there are still things that we can do as individuals. Collectively, our small actions can make a difference. For a start, most of us are driving less at the moment and we're certainly not flying anywhere. And that might be something that we choose to continue with after the pandemic. Walking and riding bikes are good for us and good for the planet. Some of us might want to change our diets. Fasting during Lent has a long history. Before refrigeration, many people ate less meat and dairy during Lent because it just wasn't available. Meat production contributes a lot to global warming so we might choose to have a meat free day each week. We could eat more fish which would help our fishermen who are having a difficult time at the moment.

And there are lots of other things that we can do at home. We can change to LED light bulbs to reduce our energy consumption. We might want to think about changing to a renewable energy supplier. As the weather warms we can get out in the garden and enjoy planting seeds and encouraging wildlife. Plants help to capture carbon and they also make us feel better. When we do plant things, we should avoid using compost with peat in it. Peat bogs store even more carbon than forests and need to be preserved. We can improve our own soil by creating a compost heap. We can recycle more. And just buy less stuff. All of these things help to reduce our carbon footprint. And they are all in the spirit of simplicity that we see in Jesus.

St John's Building Group has been thinking about how our church can reduce its carbon footprint and we hope to share some ideas soon. We are already using more LED bulbs and monitoring our energy use. In April we hope to plant some more trees in the Parish Centre grounds. Some of us did the RSPB bird count a couple of weeks ago and we're putting up boxes for swifts. We're also looking at the church's investments and making sure that we don't put our money into fossil fuel industries. There's a lot more to do but I'm delighted that St John's has just been awarded our Silver Eco Church Award. There are only two other churches in the Diocese that have received this award and this is a major achievement.

Climate change is a huge issue. There are lots of people in all sorts of wildernesses at the moment. But we are not powerless. There are things we can do. At the end of his time in the wilderness, Jesus came to Galilee

and proclaimed good news, saying the kingdom of God had come near. We too can get beyond wilderness and bring good news to people like Orbisa. We can all help to bring God's kingdom nearer. Amen.