

## **EETM St Serf's 10.00: Luke 4.1-13 10 March 2019 (Lent 1)**

When I was first ordained priest, my friend and former New Testament tutor, Leslie, came to preach at my first Eucharist. Before the service, he gave me a present - a book by one of my favourite theologians, Walter Brueggemann. In it, Leslie had written that he prayed I might be enabled to open up the Scriptures to the people I ministered among, and enable them to make connections between the text and their own lives.

Well, that's something I've always tried to do. And there are some occasions when you sit down to the text and it is almost impossible to make any sort of meaningful connection between it and the reality of everyday life - days when you wrestle and

wrestle with the text trying to puzzle out any semblance of relevance for today's society.

Today is not one of those days. When we read again the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, there are plenty of connections to be made between this strange story and our own lives. The devil offers Jesus three things – material wealth (bread); power over the nations of the world; and fame – for that is what he surely would have had if he had jumped from the parapet. These are the exact same things the devil tempts us with. More than ever before we are surrounded, surrounded by images persuading us, tempting us to spend money, even now, when an awful lot of us have less than we used to have. Our television, our newspapers and magazines, our public space – even our buses and trains – are completely saturated with advertising. They use every trick in the book to tempt us to buy

their products – and most times they work. Marketing budgets of big companies dwarf those for research and development, and advertising is a lucrative profession for people with a facile ability with words and an ear and an eye for the modern lifestyle. We may think we are immune – but these adverts get into our heads somehow and we end up joining in the orgy of spending, in the belief that somehow an extra 5 inches on the TV screen will make all the difference, or that this make-up will get us back in the dating market or this foreign holiday will be the once-in-a-lifetime experience we deserve.

As for power – wander down to your newsagents and see how many articles are devoted to improving your confidence (usually through changing who are), how to get a man and keep him, how to Get On In Life. All those adverts featuring confident, powerful businessmen tempting us to Take Control –

to arrogate to ourselves the power that properly belongs to God. Power corrupts – you only have to look at the history of government to understand that – but it isn't just the politicians who are vulnerable. We all fall victim to the temptation to take over, whether it's at home, at work, at church – especially at church! - and impose our own agenda. Power isn't ours to assume.

And has there been any age like this for the pursuit of fame for its own sake? The growth of the so-called reality show (though personally I can see nothing less real than locking yourself away with a bunch of strangers with all privacy eroded for three or four months) shows us that – and the number of applicants for shows like Big Brother is enormous – in excess of 200,000! 200,000 people willing to degrade and damage themselves in order that they may become that warped and pitiable thing

called a celebrity. So that they may, for a few short weeks, earn notoriety in the tabloids and surround themselves with fawning followers instead of friends. It may sound insane to you and I – but ask any class of teenagers what they want to do when they leave school and see how many say 'I want to be famous'. Even the Church has decided it wants to be on television, to allow the realities of everyday ministry to be cut up, edited, rearranged and repackaged at the discretion of some spotty producer waving a royalty cheque. Madness.

The point is, all of these temptations work, because they speak to our secret and our fundamental inadequacies. Our lives are not rich enough, so we need to fill them with stuff, stuff we don't need but stuff we've been persuaded we want. We're scared we are unimportant, insignificant little worms who don't understand what's going on in our lives, so we try to take

control over ourselves and over other people, and that way make ourselves important and significant. We're terrified of being alone and unknown, so we try to find ways the whole world will know us, even for a short while. These are real fears – and we are all prey to them. To a greater or lesser extent, the devil beats us all, because we all, to a greater or lesser extent, suffer from those fears. The only one he can't beat is Jesus. So it is to him we must look when our dark inadequacies envelop us. With Jesus, our lives are more rich than we could ever know. With Jesus, we are completely significant and secure in who we are. With Jesus we are never alone and in need of no-one else's approval. With Jesus we are utterly, utterly loved.

Amen.