

Lent 1. 2022. Revd David Treharne

Collect

Heavenly Father, your Son battled with the powers of darkness, and grew closer to you in the desert: help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer that we may witness to your saving love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Luke 4:1-13 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA). The Temptation of Jesus

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'⁴ Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."' "

⁵ Then the devil^[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

⁶ And the devil^[b] said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.'⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'⁸ Jesus answered him, 'It is written,

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "

⁹ Then the devil^[c] took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you",¹¹ and

"On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

¹² Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sermon: Battling the 3 (Noetic) Giants. Revd David Treharne

The events of the last few weeks have awakened me once again to something I've preached about before on several occasions... the 3 evil spiritual giants that lurk in us and around us... they prevent our flourishing as human beings and instead facilitate darkness and destruction upon ourselves, our souls, our bodies our networks... even countries in our world.

The early Church fathers taught about these 3 giants. they taught that our souls, even the very earth itself hangs in the balance and hinges on whether we can slay these giants. All other spiritual problems stem from these 3 giants.

These giants weaken our spiritual core. They can weaken and damage churches and communities, and they can even end up causing what we see happening in Ukraine.

1. The first giant is **Ignorance**. This is not a lack of knowledge or understanding in an intellectual sense... but a lack of knowledge of God and lack of awareness of the spiritual realm... the love and power of God, as shown through Jesus Christ. Lack of

awareness of ourselves, each other and the world around us. Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"

Within the word ignorance we have the word ignore... to overlook, to disregard.

Today in the Gospel we hear about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness by the devil. Let us not be ignorant of the reality of spiritual battle with rather unpleasant forces. Don't ignore the reality of temptation, and the subtle ways we can be duped into sin and into destructive behaviours on a personal, interpersonal and global level.

Look at the Ukraine / Russia issue. The corporate 'we' have been ignorant. We have overlooked and disregarded and not been aware of what was about to happen. Yes, hindsight is a wonderful gift, but Putin took over 20% of Georgia in 2008 and annexed Crimea in 2014. Each time the world pretty much overlooked his actions. We have been ignorant. Suspect money has been coming into our economy for years but we ignored it. Choosing self interest because of the possible negative affects on our pockets and politics has been an ignorant act. And look at the ignorance with regards to truth and fake news.

Ignorance is a dangerous spiritual giant and we ignore it personally and politically at our peril!

Any fans of Yes Prime Minister here? I love that episode 'The Grand Design.' In it Jim Hacker the PM talks about using salami tactics... slice by slice... little pieces at a time.

Temptation and sin is like that... you succumb to a little bit at a time. By the way I'm an expert on sin!! I can speak with great knowledge and authority!! But I'm not the only one. Remember the joke... the minister told his congregation that there are 700 different sins. He has already received 46 requests for the list!

Brothers and sisters, don't be ignorant of the salami tactics of the devil where a little bit of ground is given to allow a little sin to take root, only for it to expand and take possession of more territory within us, or indeed around us.

Awareness, mindfulness, openness, perception and discernment are really important means of slaying ignorance. Jesus was totally aware of the spiritual battle, his eyes open to the subtleness and salami tactics of temptation and sin. "Go on, have some bread" says Satan. "You're hungry and what's wrong with a bite to eat."

2. The second giant lurking is forgetfulness. Ignorance leads to spiritual forgetfulness although it could be the other way around. Spiritual forgetfulness is an evil giant.

We must remember and never forget. Wow, have we not seen this giant in action? Never forget our God, his presence, his story, his teaching, his commandments... it is ignorance to forget. Never forget the lessons of the past.

Never forget your conversion, your baptism, your faith story, the reason you ended up being a follower of Jesus Christ. Never forget his words of affirmation, mercy and love. “You are my beloved.” Never forget the virtues such as

- Love. ...
- Honesty. ...
- Charity. ...
- Contentment. ...
- Humility. ...
- Diligence. ...
- Patience.

Never forget. Remembrance is such an important Christian virtue to slay forgetfulness. That’s why we repeat in ritual... in order to remember. “Do this in remembrance of me”. We should never forget Christ, his death and resurrection.

Do not forget the Lord your God! Don’t forget his commandments.

Jesus defeated the giant of forgetfulness as he remembered the Scriptures, he remembered his experience of his encounter with the Father and the Spirit in the river Jordan at his baptism, and he remembered his status as a beloved child of God.

3. Finally, the third giant we need to overcome according to the Church Fathers, is **laziness or apathy.**

Again, we see the affects of this giant being allowed to run riot. Apathy let’s things happen. Apathy can’t be bothered. Apathy ignores and leads to ignorance and forgetfulness. Apathy believes that we in our own individual lives can do nothing to stop or change the present destructive order of things in our world. Nothing will have any effect... so why bother? Apathy, indifference and laziness stamp out the embers of hope... Spiritual apathy emerges from not remembering and trusting and hoping in the power of God.

Jesus, overcame apathy by not allowing his trust in God and his Word to be stolen from his heart and mind, even when totally exhausted. He overcame apathy by relying on the Spirit of God. He overcame apathy by perseverance and endurance. He overcame apathy by awareness of the spiritual battle and remembrance of the good things of God.

Ignorance, forgetfulness and apathy. All other spiritual problems stem from these 3 giants.

“Imagine that there are three powerful and mighty giants... ignorance, the source of all evils; forgetfulness, its close relation and helper; and laziness, which weaves the dark shroud enveloping the soul in murk.

If you wish to conquer these three passions, enter within yourself through prayer and with the help of God. Descend into the depths of the heart, and search out these three powerful giants of the devil.” St Mark the Ascetic

Brothers and sisters, our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the powers such as ignorance, forgetfulness and apathy.

These are might giants but the great news is that Jesus has overcome these giants and so we can too. “He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4 “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

St Mark the Ascetic: Late 5th Century AD... from the Philokalia Vol I. Page 158-159.

“If then, my son, you wish to acquire within yourself your own lamp of spiritual light and knowledge, so as to walk without stumbling in the dark night of this age; and if you wish your steps to be ordered by the Lord, delighting in the way of the Gospel... then I will show you a wonderfully spiritual method to help you achieve this. It does not call for bodily exertion, but requires effort of the soul, control of the intellect, and an attentive understanding, assisted by fear and love of God...

Imagine that there are three powerful and mighty giants... ignorance, the source of all evils; forgetfulness, its close relation and helper; and laziness, which weaves the dark shroud enveloping the soul in murk.

If you wish to conquer these three passions, enter within yourself through prayer and with the help of God. Descend into the depths of the heart, and search out these three powerful giants of the devil – forgetfulness, laziness and ignorance... which enable the rest of the evil passions to infiltrate and be active...to live and prevail in the hearts of the self-indulgent and in the souls of the uninstructed. Then through strict attention and control of the intellect, together with help from above, you will track down these evil passions, about which most men are ignorant, not even suspecting their existence, but which are more destructive than all the rest. Take up the weapons of righteousness that are directly opposed to them: mindfulness of God, for this is the cause of all the blessings; the light of spiritual knowledge, through which the soul awakens from its slumber and drives out of itself the darkness of ignorance; and true ardour, which makes the soul eager for salvation.”