

## Sermon 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024

## Mark 1 9-15

We are in Lent, the season which takes us from Ash Wednesday through to Holy Week and Easter. A time in the church year which builds to Jesus' suffering and crucifixion then reaches the climax of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Day. And if that wasn't enough, this year we have the joy of knowing Reverend Kris Seward will have been installed as our Rector on March 27<sup>th</sup> and he will preside at our Benefice Communion Service in St Peter's Cogenhoe at 10am on Easter Sunday. But first we have to negotiate Lent, that period when our churches have a sombre feel with no Glorias or Alleluias, no flowers, and the colour purple signalling repentance, preparation and mourning; during this period, we sing more muted hymns and pray more than usual, or we should! In this season, Jesus spends 40m days in the wilderness as he prays to God and prepares himself for his ministry and his eventual journey to the cross.

Wilderness times are no fun!

My most profound experience of wilderness has been walking through the past nine months since Roger died. I have felt the loss of identity, having been a "Mrs. Cobley" for 50 years, one half of a loving partnership, suddenly I was alone: no longer a wife, no longer with a husband to love and care for! So, who am I? Of course, I am still blessed to be a mother and grandma, I am still the same person yet I am profoundly different. Roger and I were such a close partnership, I could never have imagined life without him, yet here I am a Widow in the Wilderness.

Each year, on the First Sunday in Lent, we tell the story of wilderness, and there is Jesus right in the middle of it. It is the Spirit who leads Jesus into the wilderness! The Spirit, who has come descending from the clouds in the form of a dove: "You are my Son, my beloved", the same words used at the baptism of Jesus and my absolute favourite reading in the bible. God proclaiming Jesus as his Son Immediately following his commission into public ministry, the Spirit forces Jesus into the wilderness . . . every single year. Why is wilderness such an important part of the Christian's journey? Does God really want us to suffer? It would be much easier to follow God if it meant life wasn't a struggle and we didn't have to face loss and sadness! Yet, here's the thing about wilderness: *it is a place of formation, a place of strengthening*. When Moses led the people out of Egypt, they were "no people." They came out the other side "God's people". They forged a new identity. Jesus faces the hunger,

loneliness, and temptations that will challenge his public ministry and he finds the strength to face the cross.

My wilderness over the past months, has forced me to rely on God more than ever, to trust in him because he knows what he is doing even if we don't. In my work in this benefice, God has been my saviour, he has kept me going and revitalised me, along with the love and support of you all, and that is part of MY journey. I have had to trust God and rely on him for strength I never knew I had and he has not failed me.

What have been the wilderness places in your lives, the places and times when you have felt alone or lost? We all have to face them at various points in life, but we can do so knowing Jesus has been there before us. So I urge you to turn to God and rely on him for strength to carry you through, remembering that he loves you and will uphold you while you pray and become closer to him while you reclaim your identity, perhaps, in my case, not as "Mrs Cobley", but as a child of God.

In his absence, I'm sure Roger would agree with that!