

In the past when I have led discussions with young people about today's readings, I have tended to play Simon Says first and started a discussion about who we listen to! What are the voices we choose to hear, and the judgements we make about those voices. The challenge of course, in Simon says is to not get tricked! You just must listen carefully and only do what Simon tells you to do. Life as we know, is not so simple, people or voices often don't have warning signs above them indicating that they are voices we should ignore – or maybe they do. How do we know who is telling the truth, how do we make the right decisions about the choices we make?

The truth is, like in the game Simon says, sometimes we get it wrong and make poor decisions. I was reflecting with someone this week about the benefit of hindsight – we can all look back and say '*that was not the best decision*' – despite at the time being sure we were making the right choice. As the person I was chatting pointed out – this is the gift of our confession each Sunday, we are sorry for not only the things we do, but the things we have left on done.

The reality is for many of us, temptation is not the attraction of doing anything wrong, but rather the challenge of the choices we make and the things we left on done. So often the decisions which are hard for us are not an evil voice leading us astray – rather is that we make a poor choice.

In essence, this is one way to look at the story of Adam and Eve. So often we avoid this story because it is hard to live and forgot that it is not literal but allegory. But it is within the biblical text for a reason. It highlights that from the beginning of time, when presented with opportunity for things to be simple or easy, more powerful or more comfortable – there is a trait within humanity which is drawn to that path regardless of the moral, ethical and even personal implications.

But even that is a little simplistic, because as we know temptations or wrong decisions or even disobedience isn't always based on a false opportunity or bad choice.

Sometimes a temptation presents itself as a plausible opportunity. In the story of Adam and Eve in the garden, who is telling the truth – God or the Serpent? How do Adam and Eve process this?

.... The serpent promises that Eve and Adam will become “*like gods, ones who know good and evil*” (3:5). Later in Genesis 3:22, God declares that the humans have indeed become “*like us, knowing good and evil,*”. Thus, the snake seems to have correct information about the consequences of eating from garden’s trees -- information that God did not reveal to the humans. The serpent’s question to Eve is not exactly a lie, but it is cunning! The serpent seems to be setting up these humans, or God, or both, for a confrontation.<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, this is a difficult text, and it raises some difficult questions about our understanding of God and of evil; but the key to this passage is in its literary value, and our understanding of *seeing and knowing*. This is not just in the eating of forbidden fruit, but in the conversations taking place, and the opportunities presented – the seeing and knowing of humanity change.

This is not a simple story about how sin entered the world. Nor is it the answer to why there is temptation. But it is the basis for an image which is used throughout the biblical text when we explore the tension between God and Humanity – and the broken relationships and broken covenants that follow. *The sin of Adam* is used through biblical literature to describe the fracture between God and Humanity and the tensions in that relationship. Paul even uses this term when addressing the Romans. ‘Because we are all like Adam we must take responsibility for our sin’. That is – we need to take responsibility for our choices and actions – whatever the opportunities which might be presented to us.

But what is the point of playing with the language of temptation and being made uncomfortable by the images of biblical literature? Well hopefully it helps us understand Christ more fully – and hopefully it helps to understand ourselves as well and who we are – our identity.

And so we turn to our Gospel and the image of Jesus in the desert. Jesus enters the desert for 40 days – he too is presented with a series of opportunities and needs to make choices. The image of Satan comes to Jesus at the times when he is most vulnerable and presents him with opportunities and possibilities that would relieve his hardship. But it would not be a long-term fix – it would only address Jesus immediate

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3183](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3183)

need. That is the trick of temptations isn't it, the opportunity presented looks to be a solution, a way out, from our current pain or context.

The temptations which are presented to Jesus, not unlike those presented to Adam and Eve, are about identity. Who are we in face of the opportunities that we are presented with in the world? Jesus is presented with a series of tests which would allow him to demonstrate his power and even his sovereignty – but they would not bring an outcome for a world of justice and peace<sup>2</sup>. I was having a conversation with someone of Friday about fixing many of the issues we face are very simple – but they are no way easy. Integrity takes patience. Matthew's Jesus is helping us to know who God is in the way he responds. So often we think of identity as something we forge on our own, but most of our sense of ourselves comes from the community we belong to, our family of origin, and the people with whom we hang out, as well as the choices we make as a result of this. A bit like our new patchwork altar frontal - Identity is not simply created – it is woven together with many parts and stories.

Jesus journey into the desert is very much about the defining of who he is. He is not lost, and he is not being punished for something he has done wrong - an assumption that people sometimes make about "wilderness experiences". Jesus has been led by the Holy Spirit for a purpose: to make manifest at the beginning of Jesus ministry who he is.<sup>3</sup> The debates he encounters with the devil prove his readiness for the mission entrusted to him. He has the credentials and the authority for this mission, as Matthew is eager to point out. Jesus is ready for all that will come as he begins to preach the kingdom of God.

Our Lenten journey then, does not need be a sparse desert or wilderness experience that feels like a punishment –rather it can be an experience that helps us understand better who we are and to prepare us more fully for the daily temptations and opportunities which are placed before us. A time to reflect, consider, shape ourselves, more and more into the likeness of Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/02/lent-1-a-identity-as-gift-and-promise/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3174](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3174)

The Lenten framework we choose should help us with this – it shouldn't be a burden – rather something which allows us to see more clearly both ourselves and our relationship with God. To recognise the choices we may need to make that are simple but not easy.

The 40 bags in 40-day challenge could be part of this. What things, like Adam and Eve, like the Romans, and even like Jesus before us – do we need to let go of so that we can really see who we are in the light of God. Are there things which constantly offer temptation for us that we need to let go of for good so that we can be more fully ourselves.

However, we find ourselves this Lent, whatever opportunities are presented to us – may we have the courage to be led away from temptations, and to more fully embrace our own identity in Christ.  
Amen