+WEEKLY REFLECTION

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Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

Matthew 4:1-11

Most of us face temptation many times every day.

It might be the temptation to have another glass of wine on a Tuesday evening when we know we have an early start the next day.

It might be the temptation to grab a packet of crisps when we walk through the door after work, even though we've promised ourselves we are going to be healthier.

It might be the temptation to spend money we don't really have, or to put off a job we know needs doing.

There is nothing particularly unusual about being tempted. In fact, temptation is part of being human.

But the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness were different. They were not simply about bread, safety or power. They were temptations to abandon God's way and choose an easier path.

The devil repeatedly challenged Jesus with the words: "If you are the Son of God..."

In other words, "Why not do things your own way? Why not take control? Why not use your power for yourself? Why not take a shortcut?"

That is often how temptation works in our lives too. It rarely appears as something obviously wrong. More often it comes disguised as the easier option, the quicker route, or the more comfortable choice.

As a headteacher, I occasionally found myself in situations where there was pressure to take a particular course of action that would make life easier in the short term. There were times when parents, governors, staff or external agencies all seemed to be pulling in different directions.

Sometimes the easiest choice would have been the most popular one; yet deep down I knew it was not the right one.

Those moments can be deeply uncomfortable. We pray for guidance and then discover that God's answer is leading us somewhere we would rather not go. We hope for an easy resolution, but instead God calls us to have a difficult conversation. We ask Him to remove a challenge, yet He asks us to walk faithfully through it.

One of the most important lessons from this passage is that prayer is not about persuading God to do what we want.

Sometimes we can approach prayer as though we are presenting God with our preferred plan and asking Him to approve it. Yet Jesus shows us something very different. Throughout His ministry, and ultimately in Gethsemane, His attitude is always, ‘Not my will, but yours be done’.

That can be hard to hear because God's path is not always the one we would choose for ourselves. The temptation in the wilderness reminds us that faith is not about demanding that God follows our agenda. It is about opening our lives to His agenda. It is about trusting that He sees more clearly than we do, even when the way ahead looks difficult or uncertain.

Jesus refused to take the easy path because He trusted His Father completely.

As Christians, we are called to do the same.

Not because it is easy.

Not because we always understand.

But because, like Jesus, we believe that God's way ultimately leads to life.

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