

GEN. 2:15-3:7

MATT. 4:1-11

WHEN YOU FEEL THE LACK.

I was very shy as a child...yes, really. I vividly remember the day I was first told by my mum to go to the cheese counter on the market to ask by myself for what we wanted, hand over the money, take the change and say 'thank you'. It's the job of a loving parent to propel their child into places of new responsibility, even if it's hard for them at first. But what happens when someone who is supposed to love you moves you into something which goes on a long time, when you feel fearful and as if you don't have what you need, and which carries real dangers?

Can God be trusted? Does he really love me? Then why does he not give me what I think I need and give it to me now? It's when doubts come in that trust and love are truly tested and the temptation to do your own thing looms very large.

Jesus arrives on the scene when John is baptising. The voice of God from heaven says *'this is my son, whom I love'* (Matt. 3:17). Then Jesus is led by God's Spirit- we assume they're on the same side- into the desert *'to be tempted by the devil'* (4:1). It seems to be a statement about God allowing this all to happen, intending it.

Let's think about a desert. They're not all like the Sahara, of course. Some are sandy, some are not but deserts are places of emptiness, a place where things are 'lacking'. Not much water, not much growth, not much comfort or shelter. Where other things are lacking, thoughts of the job ahead for Jesus, fears of what is ahead could fill his mind easily enough. A desert is a place of 'lack', a place to experience what's missing.

I've just bought a table from IKEA with the brand name 'LACK' I'm sure that in Swedish it probably means something completely different but to me it fits the name 'LACK' quite well: it's a basic rectangle with 4 legs, one shelf, no decoration, drawers, handles, fancy bits of any kind....and it only costs £16! There's nothing extra. It's a LACK table!

But suppose the lack is far more significant to life? You lack good health or loving relationships or someone to help you in your decisions; you lack work or a sense of purpose. You begin to wonder if you are unprotected, if God really cares. So you are really vulnerable to the voice which says *'Do it your own way'*

Here's the progression of the temptations of Jesus. He's hungry, alone, lacking. *'Turn these stones into bread'* is another way of saying *'Use your own power to get food or anything else you feel like. You know what you need....get it. Act now or else it may not come. You can't sit around waiting for God.'* (v.2-4)

If you do manage to withstand the temptation to believe God can't or won't give what you need, the next stage may well be to question whether God really cares at all. So the devil whispers in Jesus' ear – *'Ask him to prove that he cares; make him prove that he's powerful. Test out whether he'll save you or not. Maybe he can't; maybe he doesn't want to. Throw yourself down and see if those promises about angels really come to anything.'* (v. 5-7)

If you begin to feel you lack what you want and you're not sure if God cares, then maybe the next thing to do is to surround yourself with other things to make you feel secure- people who admire you, possessions, status, activity, others who seem to promise what you need.

Jesus has great power. He could perform all the tricks and miracles in the book, people would flock to him, do everything he wanted, he could become rich and powerful. Why not do it? Worship me, says the devil, worship me who can take you away from God and your worries about whether he cares or not. Jesus will not. The devil leaves him. The angels come.

They are all compelling arguments when you feel there is a desert emptiness in your life. It's the same progression for Adam and Eve. Why won't God give them the knowledge they want, the fruit they think they need? Can he really care? So they get what they can in their own way and turn their backs on God.

Moses and Elijah – who had their mountaintop experiences also had their desert days (in fact those times came quite close together). Did they mishear or misunderstand God when it all seemed good? Did Jesus misunderstand when he said he loved him, if there was then such a difficult road to travel?

I have sometimes felt a lack in my life. I have wondered why God would not provide some tall, dark, handsome stranger to sweep me off my feet, share my life and be a constant loving companion. But I have to live by those words of psalm 23: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.* What I may feel as lack may not be what I most need or if it is, there might not be anything to be gained in going after it in the way I choose and giving up on the idea that God cares.

When Job lost everything – health, home, livelihood, children.....his wife told him to give up on his own integrity and on God: *'Curse God and die'* she said (Job 2:9). He would not.

'why am I drawn to desert and mountain fierceness?' says one writer. *'what impels me to its unmitigated honesty, its dreadful capacity to strip bare, its long compelling silence? It's the frail hope that in finding myself brought to the edge, to the macabre, stone-silent edge of death itself, I may hear a word whispered in its loneliness. The word is "love", spoken pointedly and undeniably to me. It may have been uttered many times in the past but I'm fully able to hear it only in that silence'* (*The solace of fierce Landscapes' – Belden C. Lane*)

Our prayers to God sometimes only start when there's nowhere else to go, nothing else to fill the gap.

Jesus faces a daunting job after his baptism. If he cannot believe in God's love, he will not come through. When we seem to face a desert where things are lacking, can God be trusted- his power, his care, his capacity to get it right for us?

In the face of everything else, the question is whether we believe that when he says *'I love you'* he not only means it but can give the best we need.

Cling to that and the angels will come.

Hilary Edgerton – 8.3.14

