

*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

2 Corinthians 6:2b

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We sometimes make the mistake of looking at Jesus only with the eyes of hindsight; of making assumptions based on what we know about the end of the story; based only on how the story turns out.

We know of how he will spend three years teaching and preaching; healing and helping. We know of how he will incur the wrath of the religious establishment because of his popularity; and because of the very radical way in which He speaks of the Kingdom of God. We know of his willingness to face his accusers and even death itself. And, above all, we know of the Resurrection.

We know how his story ends; and because we know the ending, we sometimes make assumptions about the beginning and the middle; assumptions which deny the very human challenges and the very real human struggles which must have gone on within the mind of Christ.

And by making such assumptions we turn Jesus into a kind of amateur stage actor going through the motions for the sake of the audience; reading from a script rather than living a real human life.

And by doing so, we rob Jesus of his full humanity.

We deny that his struggles were real human struggles; assuming that he always knew what he was going to do and how he would do it; assuming that he never doubted; that he never struggled; assuming that he was reading from the very same script that we're reading from 2000 years later.

And by turning Jesus into some kind of amateur actor we also rob ourselves of the full impact that the Gospel can have on our lives.

We rob ourselves because we make Jesus into something unreal; something remote; a kind of cartoon super-hero; someone so utterly different from us that we could never hope to be like Him; someone so different that there's no point in even trying.

And in the process, we miss the opportunity to grow and change as God has the power to help us grow and change. We miss the opportunity to have our lives transformed.

This week's Gospel speaks of one of those moments; one of those human moments of self-searching and doubt.

It speaks of the battle that Christ went through to know God's Will and to do it.

And if we're willing to think about how Jesus lived a real human life, we can imagine how tempting it must have been for him to just continue living the life he was raised to live: in his hometown, surrounded by family and friends for the rest of a quiet life. The fact that we know very little about his life growing up in Nazareth doesn't for a moment suggest that he had anything other than the normal life of a young Jewish boy; nor does it suggest that he would not have been tempted to stay right where he was, to stick with the familiar.

We can only imagine the process; we can only imagine the inner battle between

the voice of the Father and the voice of the status quo; the battle which eventually led Him to the Jordan, to be baptised by John as so many others were; to identify himself, at the very beginning of his ministry, with John's call for renewal and repentance.

Where he hears the voice of the Father: a voice speaking to him as the beloved Son; a voice speaking to him of God's pleasure.

The story of temptation which followed Christ's baptism is familiar to us all.

And for us there is an easy temptation to see this as a minor delay on the road to the Cross; just a brief curve on the road; Jesus doing mock battle with a harmless little cartoon devil; rather than with the very real and very significant division which raged within Him.

But when we're able to see this as a very real battle to obey the voice of the Father, we can begin to understand how the battle Jesus faced that day is the very same battle that we that encounter every day of our lives: the battle to listen to the voice of God or to listen the voice of evil; to listen to the voice of self-giving, which builds up; or the voice of self-serving, which tears down.

And for us, the great difficulty lies in the fact that the voice of evil is so often the voice of reason; just as it was for Jesus, hungry and thirsty at the end of his forty days.

So often the voice of the tempter masquerades as the voice of common sense – the voice which tells us not to try the impossible, not to put ourselves out, not to strive to be the very best that we can be,

The voice of our tempter tells us that it's ok to accept standards lower than we need to accept; to assume that it's alright just because everyone else is doing it or saying it; to return evil for evil and anger for anger, because that's the normal thing, the human thing, to do.

The battle in the wilderness was for Jesus a very real battle; a very real and very deadly battle within his soul; Jesus undoing Adam and Eve's moment of failure in the Garden; obeying the voice that they chose to disobey.

And in a way that none of us can truly imagine because we already know the outcome, it was a battle on which all of history depended.

The hope of our salvation, the only real hope for the world, played out that one day in those three simple questions.

Not nearly so much lies in the balance in the daily battles that we face, but our own personal histories do. The stories which we create every day depend on our ability to weed out the voices which encourage us to do less than God wishes; to do those things which serve us for the moment but inevitably lead to unhappiness and sorrow; to tear down rather than to build up.

In that battle lies our happiness and the happiness of those around us.

And in Christ lies our victory.

The Season of Lent is our time to listen closely to all the voices that speak within us; to step back from life and to look at it in entirely new ways; to go into the spiritual wildernesses of our soul; and hear the voice of the Father.

To build up and not tear down.

To serve God and humanity in the name of Christ.

To build better lives and to work towards a better world, by the Grace which we have in Christ.