

**'FED BY GRACE'**

Our Genesis reading today helps to set the scene for today's reflection. It takes place in a garden which requires work to keep it neat and tidy – the garden will provide all the needs of those who are tending to it. That is with one exception – do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It's a story about calling, trust, and restraint.

Matthew's reading provides us with a counter-test: Jesus is tempted by the devil with power, prestige, and self-protection - things which are important to people today – yet Jesus refuses to accept every shortcut that would betray love for fear and pride for control. Reading both Genesis and Matthew together, we are given a glimpse of the kind of life that chooses fidelity to God over allurements of power and love for neighbour over self-protective pride. The Jesus who refuses is the same Jesus who invites us into practices that make faithfulness less fragile and love more fearless.

From the very beginning, Jesus' behaviour and attitude is completely one of faithfulness, peace, love, goodness, self-control, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, and of course obedience to his Heavenly Father rather than unnecessary displays of power. In the wilderness, the tempter offers a throne without a cross: authority over nations if Jesus will bow in worship to power. Jesus answers with words from past scriptures, with his deeper insistence being more relational: his duty is to the Father, not to the spectacle of control. He doesn't bend reality to suit his own comfort or reputation. Instead, he takes comfort and his confidence from what his heavenly Father has provided, even when hunger and exposure to the elements are his current companions. Faithfulness, then, begins with knowing and accepting that we belong to God whose love is unconditional– knowing whom you belong to, and letting *that* identity govern what we do, especially when fear takes over us becoming the prompt to our actions towards self-protectiveness.

To help us encourage faithfulness over fear and love over pride, maybe we could adopt new for some and for others, well-trod disciplines:

Living lives which are centered in prayer that names dependence.

Begin and end each day with brief, honest prayers naming your fears, pride, and longings for love. When we practice this each morning, we reshape our heart of dependence away from self-reliance and move it toward the living Heavenly Father who has provided for us, fed and sustained us, and through grace has forgiven us.

We can use scripture as our true compass. Take a moment each day to read some of the scriptures. Today, we've heard from both Genesis and Matthew, through the week we have the opportunity to read a scripture through the St Ninian's prayers and reflection devotional. Today the scriptures offer us an invitation to apply it to a current temptation.

Jesus counters temptation with the truth of God's word. Scripture becomes a protective lens, clarifying what true power is and how love manifests.

Take time to listen and discern what the Holy Spirit is asking of you. Fear-driven choices are often made on an impulse and often don't work out well. Discernment grows and nurtures patience, authority is exercised with exercised with restraint, kindness, respect and responsibility toward others.

Be accountable for your actions, and willing to share your vulnerability in your faith community. It ought not be seen as a weakness to show your vulnerabilities in a community who purport to love and care for you. Pride and prejudices thrive in secrecy; when we name temptations and allow ourselves to hear concerns from others, we learn to endure and grow in love rather than press our inflated egos upon others.

One of the things we talk about often is that we are an inclusive church community. Inclusive rather than domination. We can ask ourselves how we can serve and elevate others, in particular those who are vulnerable, rather than always wanting to put our own faces, opinions, gifts and talents on the front line and to our own advantage.

Love displaces the hunger for status and an egalitarian attitude. When we operate from a heart of hospitality and service, we are practicing the fruit of the spirit, which I named earlier. The greatest one of course is love.

Worship and keeping Sunday as a special day – setting it apart from other days of the week is a gift you can give to God and yourself as it helps to reset the rhythms for the rest of the days of the week and your purpose for them. Spiritual purposes, hospitality purposes, service purposes, inclusivity and accountability purposes, as well as many others. It can be a busy day!

Understanding that naming grief, betrayal, or fear before God and others, don't come with a quick fix or rewordings. Words matter and it's important to say what you mean with clarity and gentleness.

Honest lament keeps us from spiritual weatherproofing – that is pretending strength where we are vulnerable – invite God's mercy to reshape a desire toward love.

The last thing I offer is the ethic of costly love. If you can choose actions that invest in a long-term good rather than immediate self-glory even though sometimes it may not be convenient or even desired. The pathway that Jesus took through the wilderness towards the cross shows the way to love is costly but transformative. It renews and revitalises, power from within, not by coercion, and never ever at the expense of anyone else.

In the end, the Jesus who refuses power, prestige, and self-protection invites us into a life of trustful obedience and allow ourselves to be well fed by God's grace.

What I've outlined isn't a formula for success but disciplines that form us into people who fight fear with faith, pride with humility, and self-protection with costly love. May we learn to care for creation with love, serve one another with gentleness, and find our true strength in our God who wins through self-giving love.