

Daily following - 22 Jan 23.

I don't know if any of you have ever been to Gibraltar, but one side of the Rock has the appearance of being shaved sheer. This is, in fact, a water catchment, so that what rain falls is collected for later use. It is hardly a novel idea, but what is surprising is that so few countries follow suit, even when they regularly have droughts, despite heavy rainy seasons.

I have to imagine God sighing sadly, and thinking, 'Why are they so dumb? Can't they see that I send enough rain to give them water to last? But no - they waste it, and then whine to me when it gets to the dry season. I

sometimes wonder why I gave them brains at all, it's clear they don't use them much.'

It doesn't stop with water though, does it? It has been calculated that there is more than enough food to feed the world's population; it just doesn't get to the right people. How is that? It is not because we lack the facilities and knowledge to transport it; so why doesn't it get there? Because greedy people horde it and then sell it to other greedy people who don't need it - to make a profit, and the other greedy people - now stuffed to bursting, will eventually throw an enormous amount of it away.

We have seen this in butter mountains, milk mountains, and so on - but we also see it daily on our own plates, to our shame.

Having been a boarding school brat, leaving food on your plate was not an option. You sat until it was finished - however gopping or unpalatable it was. If you didn't, your plate would reappear at the next meal with the unfinished food on it - now looking even more unappetizing, and it had darn well disappear this time or a trip to the Headmaster's study would be in order.

What I am driving at today is waste.

I have hinted at it in my meanderings from time to time, but I want to take a slightly different slant on it today. As some of us slip - almost unaware - into what have been called our 'twilight years', we need to make sure that we use what time we have left wisely and constructively. Here, most of us in Agassiz and Harrison have an abundance of most things. Some of us will be grateful because we had to work for what we have, and some of us will probably take our plenty for granted - because we've always had it.

So I want to consider not just how often we waste water or food - though that is something you might want to adjust - but to

look at one thing from our existence in the natural world, and one thing from outside it, in the supernatural world. Those two things are time and God's grace. I would suggest that we cannot afford to waste either.

Looking at the gospel for today, we read about James and John, the sons of Zebedee - or the Boanerges Brothers, as they came to be known, or Sons of Thunder, for their request to Jesus that they call down 'fire from heaven' on the Samaritans who would not give them a bed for the night in Luke 9:54.

But long before that, in this initial calling, we see James and John 'immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.'

Note two things here; first, that they did not waste any time; the word is 'immediately' they left the boat and their father; second; they responded to God's grace by following Jesus - but in an on-going way. It wasn't just a case of, 'OK, we'll come and have a cup of coffee with you and see what you have to say' - but a literal drawing of these men to the person of Jesus - like the drawing in of a net full of fish. No wonder Jesus used that image to tell them what their next job would be.

But consider - there must have been a huge attraction there for these two men to just give up **everything** and leave their dad in the boat with the morning catch - and never go

back. You have heard me say before now that our job is to make this church an attractive place that people will want to come to. I am not into bible-thumping proselytising; coercion never makes for real conversion anyway.

However, the analogy of being drawn to Jesus as a fish in a net suggests being caught, which is not something most of us want to be; so perhaps the idea of being drawn by his charisma or personal magnetism would be easier to sit with. For me, I like to think that responding to Jesus' call is like putting myself in the right place, so that I know I'm where he wants me, and hopefully doing what he wants me to do. I can only do that if I remain in his

grace - in his field of magnetism, in his sphere of influence.

'OK, fine', you may think, 'that sounds all hunky-dory. So what?' Well, the answer is easy, because you cannot fulfil God's purpose for your life if you are not near him spiritually, not under his grace, not within his magnetic field, if you like. This is one of the reasons we come to church - to benefit from the attraction and magnetic fields that others share with Jesus. It's like we are building up a bigger and bigger magnet as we congregated together. It strengthens us, and we have heard about being strengthened in the very last verse before our gospel began this

morning - it was that angels strengthened Jesus and ministered to him after the devil left him, following his temptation in the wilderness.

But there is another message here too; if Jesus can attract - so can the devil. Remember what the devil was offering Jesus; food, because he had been fasting for weeks; the opportunity to prove his divinity to all - before he had started his ministry; and power - world domination - but in return for bowing down and serving the devil.

Consider then, how important the plea of our psalm is; 'The Lord is the stronghold of my life

— of whom shall I be afraid? For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.'

So just as Jesus has a personal magnet to attract people to his grace, so also does the devil by his temptations to evil. The problem with evil is that it is often far more immediately attractive than grace. It offers instant gratification - often in the form of sex, food, money, or power and influence. Is it any wonder, then, that almost all advertising is based on one or more of these ephemeral temptations? Put them all together into one advertisement, and you have the gorgeous girl

in a bikini, stretched out in provocative pose on the bonnet or hood of some expensive sports car. Or maybe, these days, you'll have some hunk strutting his stuff in his Calvin Kleins too. That's throwing the whole lot at you in one go - oh, I forgot the food! OK - we'll give the girl a lollipop to suck - that will make it impossible to resist.

And you see what this sort of temptation offers you? Things that you haven't got and usually can't afford without serious consequences. Even if you can afford such luxuries, is that the best way to spend your money?

Sheila and I watched a programme the other day in which someone asked, 'Is it a crime for a rich person to spend money on nice things?' - referring to a thousand dollar suit and expensive watch.

I think the answer would be 'No, but it would be, if you only spent money on yourself.'

Right, I want to wrap up this message with a little reinforcement.

What I am talking about is a 'daily following' of Jesus - all day, every day. This is not supposed to sound like a dreadful, dreary existence in perpetual service. Imagine, if you will, being your own dog (I am assuming you treat him or her as well as you treat yourself -

if not, give him to me). You call him every day, and he comes with a bound and a smile, as if to say. 'What are we going to do today? Whatever it is, it's all right with me!'

He or she relies on you for all the things he needs in life - food, warmth, shelter, and love.

That is how we should envisage our daily walk with Jesus; we are not his slaves, we are not chained up, we are not whipped if we disobey.

We may be corrected and we may have to learn some hard lessons - but our teacher is always there to help us, no matter how dumb we are. And he always loves us when we hurt.

We know - just as Jesus knows - that we have the best dog in all the world - as he has made

the best people in the world; but if our dog strays, or we stray - we will be tempted by the other magnets out there. They will be strong and attractive, and smell really good - but they will be poisoned meat.

I am not asking you for a promise of a lifetime of service to Christ - but just today. If we can do it just for today we will not waste either time or grace - and, as Psalm 23 tells us, 'we will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

That sounds like a good place to me.