

## ***The Devil is in the Detail!***

*Deuteronomy 26<sup>1-11</sup>; Psalm 91<sup>1-11</sup>; Romans 10<sup>8-13</sup>; Luke 4<sup>1-13</sup>*

*When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.  
[Luke 4<sup>13</sup>]*

I am interested in what you took notice of in the readings for this morning. Was it?

- ✘ That the first-fruits of your labour belongs to God? The first thing that grows in any year; the first offspring of your animals; your first wage packet in a new job? The point is made to the Hebrews settling in Israel that God has been faithful to them since the time of Abraham and he expects the people to be faithful to him. Was that the thing that took your attention?
- ✘ Was it the clear expectation of the Psalmist that faith in God is a guarantee that you will not suffer from the **pestilence**; weapons; **sickness**; **there shall be no evil happen to you, neither shall any plague come near your tent for he shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways**. Was that the thing that you have retained?
- ✘ Paul tells us that **if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved** and then goes on to say, **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved**. Was it that?
- ✘ Jesus meets the devil after he has fasted and the devil tempts him to shortcuts – immediate food from a stone turned into bread; the worship of the world for a simple act of worship rather than a cross; the avoidance of physical harm because the devil got it wrong and didn't know that Jesus was in fact born to suffer pain. Perhaps you noticed that the devil doesn't give up – **he departed from him until an opportune time**.

Does what you 'noticed' help you understand where you are at spiritually, that being our focus during Lent? Are you more invincible than Jesus; more spiritually minded than is useful; more confident than is safe; more about getting than giving?

We are saved and we are kept safe on God's terms, not our own.

The devil couldn't get Jesus to do what he wanted because Jesus was secure in his relationship with God, knew his Scriptures and knew that there was nothing in his life that the devil could hold over him and threaten him with. Even then the devil wasn't going to leave him alone – he was waiting for his chance.

Is that true for us too? Do we know where the devil can get in and how to block him, the chance that he is waiting for to trip us up and how to prevent it?

It is unlikely that the devil will use the direct and overt tactics of Putin – he knows better than to mount a full-scale attack. It is invariably more subtle: raising doubts in our mind about God (is Psalm 91 telling lies? – if it isn't, why did people die of the plague); or about life after death (who knows that it will happen?); or suggesting, as he did to Jesus, that there is an easier path than the path of faith.

As with the notion that angels would prevent Jesus from stubbing his toe, the devil doesn't understand God's purpose not does he accept that the people of faith trust that God knows what is best for his people. The devil uses discord and mistrust.

Jesus uses Scripture against the devil because it is dependable and, whatever else the devil may argue with Christians about, he cannot gainsay the Bible.

When bank tellers are trained to recognise fraudulent banknotes they aren't introduced to the various styles of invalid notes: there would be too many to know them all. Instead, the training is spending days and days with the real thing so that they learn the look, the smell, the weight, the touch of the real thing – that's what makes the frauds easy to spot.

So it is with faith. We cannot learn how the devil will play with us, we respond by knowing what genuine faith, genuine hope and genuine love is.