



## Lent 2018

The season of Lent is one that is inspired by the 40 days and nights that Jesus spent in the Wilderness at the outset of his earthly ministry. We know that he fasted, and from this has come the tradition of people “doing without” and “giving things up”.

But Jesus’ time in the desert was about more than simply imposing upon himself a spiritual discipline for its own sake; it was about discerning and discovering the shape and nature of the ministry to which he was called. This mental struggle is presented to us in the form of three temptations - each one rejected and dismissed.

As we reflect on these, each in one way or other could have served the purpose of making Jesus a popular Messiah. To turn stones into bread would make him the great provider; the problem solver who could have attracted a large and grateful following. The temptation to throw himself from the top of the temple and emerge unscathed would have made him the great entertainer – able to mystify and impress huge crowds. Or he could have grabbed the place of power amongst the kingdoms of the world, becoming a great ruler who could compel people to obey and follow him.

Each could have served its purpose; each could have achieved some end, but none reflected Jesus’ true calling, vocation and identity. We too can sometimes feel compelled to be something we are not – to fall in line with some great scheme because of what it might achieve, rather than truly allowing ourselves to be the person God has made us. And we can sometimes do so with the best of intent.

The vision that lies behind “Unlocking the Potential” is not to simply dismiss the traditions and patterns of ministry that have served us in days gone by. But it is to highlight that we do not need to be constrained or controlled by these; that we are not called to simply fit the mould that tradition or the expectations of others impose upon us, but to be those who seek God’s will and purpose in the here and now.

Whether or not we choose to give something up, Lent offers us the opportunity as individuals and church communities to reflect on what God’s calling upon us might be. This means being open to new possibilities as well as being re-affirmed and renewed in our commitment to existing ways of living out our Gospel calling. It might also require of us to create space and opportunity for others to explore and exercise their gifts and calling.

Each of us will have different ways of recognising the season of Lent, but as we seek God together, some questions we might ask are:

What is God calling me to do and be? Am I truly able to fulfil my calling as a disciple of Jesus?

What is God saying to others around me? Am I willing to think differently so as to enable the gifts of others to be released?

What vision is God placing before us? What help do we need in discerning and pursuing God’s will for us?

Where do we struggle and face difficulty? Might this be God’s way of inviting us to do different things or to do what we do differently?

Are our ministries and activities a reflection of the gifts that God has given us, or are we trying to conform to earthly expectations and traditions?

What potential do we have as a people of God?