



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Lent 3 8.30am, Holy Communion

There is something to be said for always tackling the most difficult part of a Gospel passage in the sermon and today it seems we cannot avoid the devil.

C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful book called the Screwtape Letters in which a junior demon is trained up by a senior. It is very funny and very sharp and a wonderful exploration of faith and life and the vagaries of humanity. One thing he writes is that the best trick the devil ever played, his greatest strategic coup, was to convince us that he didn't exist.

I remember a very humane and wise lecturer at university saying that if we believe in God it is not so very implausible to believe in the devil. Jewish literature suggests he is an angel that tried to go his own way. He then convinced Adam and Eve to do the same: to go it alone, to unseat God by becoming the masters of our own lives. To choose independence, self-reliance and isolation; rather than dependence, mutual self-gift and belonging.

That is the root of pride, and it's what *did* for the devil, and for Adam and Eve. It's what *does* for us sons of Adam and daughters of Eve still.

In the end, the pride of wishing to have the fullness of life on our own back and standing on our own two feet will, it seems, lead us to hell. Instead, the Gospel is a challenging message that tells us that to *really* live we have to give our lives away, joyfully accept our

innate dependence on God in all things; weakness and self-gift being, paradoxically, our means of discovering the abundance of our being. In heaven, the culmination of this universal love affair will be complete and ecstatic reciprocity of self-abandonment, self-gift. We begin to live that now in part, but then in full. This means that the message of self-dependence, of self-creation, and self-fulfilment that is all around us is actually a deceit. The father of lies is peddling the same old plan, even though he has already suffered the result of it.

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, we read of the enemy's final defeat. It is certain. Christ's utter self-gift on the Cross has made all the devil's pride-ful struggles futile. The final score is already on the board. But, like Hitler in the bunker perhaps the liar has begun to believe his own lies; they are after all, all he has. It's no wonder then that the devil was especially active in the Gospels. While Jesus walked the earth so the devil got busy, because it was a last-ditch hope to stop the unstoppable. Even in the devil's desperate attempts then and now, Love cannot in the end be stopped, because all things came *from* and all things are destined *for* the Love of God.

Our destiny lies before us now. Here in the Eucharist we receive Jesus again as He abandons Himself into our lives, hidden in bread and wine. It is a foretaste of that complete and ecstatic mutual self-gift of the Kingdom. It is the devil's worst nightmare. Every time the Eucharist is celebrated the devil's grasp, by Jesus' Love and our response, gets weaker and weaker. Truth, beauty and love flood our bodies, our lives and our world because of what we do here and live out from here in the rest of the week. This is our destiny, and we begin to live it here and now. This Lent, let's enter into the fray with renewed vigour, come here to the altar with renewed purpose, and know our destiny, putting aside all that is contrary, with renewed hope.