**Lent 1 - the temptations**.

I have very happy memories of my five years as vicar of Grove Hill, Middlesbrough. It was a tough job in a run-down area which had been an experimental garden village. My predecessor had built it up. The church was full for every service, the clubs and organisations were packed, and the vicar literally worked himself to death. Archbishop Garbutt asked the church what sort of vicar they wanted to follow him. They said they wanted somebody like him: a hard worker, brilliant speaker, wonderful charisma etc. Garbutt said, "So you want the archangel Gabriel, but we don't have anyone like that!" Years later, as a bishop, I discovered that people's expectations can be very high, but are often quite unreal.

This was the situation when Jesus began his ministry. People's expectations were unreal. For a thousand years, the Jews had been promised a saviour. He would be another Joshua (Jesus is the same name): a warrior, a seasoned fighter, someone who had led his countrymen across the Red Sea and set them down in a promised land. The Jews were looking for a very big man - another Joshua who would free them from the Roman occupation of their country, make them strong again, and give them financial and economic security. Their expectations were for a warlike and exceedingly clever political leader. Another Joshua.
 "No," said God. "I can't give them someone like that. But I will give them my Son, Jesus."

Now, it's against this background that we have to read the story of the temptations. You have the huge build-up of a thousand years and more, of great leaders and heroes - the Joshuas of Jewish history, and you have the expectations of people who lived under Roman occupation and wanted to be free. So, Jesus starts his ministry with all this stacked against Him. He starts by following the example of his predecessors. He goes into the desert to be on his own with God. He goes to size up what God wants Him to do. Although He was divine, He was also as human as we are.

So, the devil gets to work. He knows Jesus is hungry. He plays on that. "Go on," he says. "You have enormous power. You can do anything. Don't go hungry. Pick up a stone or two from the ground. Change them into bread." Of course, Jesus knew He could do anything He wanted. He also knew that what God his Father wanted had to come first. It was top priority. What God wants matters most.

 We all recognise that temptation: to do what we want, rather than what God wants of us.

The devil tries again. "Be a superhero. Capture people's imaginations, win their respect, by something daring. Jump off the temple roof. You won't come to any harm; God will see to that, and you will have gained a huge reputation". Jesus turns the tables on his tempter. "You might be in the business of making a reputation. But I am not."

 We recognise that one too. We want to appear better than we are, but we know that's a hiding to nothing. Be yourself.

The devil never gives up. He goes for the jugular, the heart of the matter. "Look at this wonderful world," he says. "It's all yours. Exploit it, get what you can out of it, enrich yourself and grow fat on its resources. There's more to discover than you could ever imagine. All you have to do is worship me."
 "Get behind me, Satan" says Jesus. "We owe it all to God. He has given it to us to enjoy, not to destroy. We are stewards of his creation and we are to preserve it. You would have us ravish it, misuse it, ruin it, and, in the end, destroy it. Give the glory to God, and to Him alone."
 The devil gave up. Jesus crushed him in the desert sand.

 That story sends out many messages. What about?
    This is all God's world. It is ours to enjoy. Yes, enjoy.
     Let's just be ourselves, care for it, love it all, love our neighbours and friends - and love Him too.