

Aa 1min

Introductory prayer:

Ever-present Lord God, guide us in our hopes and our doubts, our struggles and our triumphs, and encourage us as we faithfully believe. Amen.

3a 5min

The pandemic has done strange things to our sense of time, our perspective, our outlook. It is little wonder that there have been confusions around various rules for behaviour during this period: social norms that have stood in place for hundreds and hundreds of years have been dismantled, reassembled, shifted, grown and shrunk, all within twelve months.

The change of pace has been dramatic; some have found it to be really positive, others have been completely shaken. Some people have been largely unaffected, while other lives have been completely torn apart. Through this year, we have perhaps seen the duality of Job's response in ourselves and in others. Job tells God that 'you have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit' (10:12), but also that 'I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul' (10:1). Job's reactions are extreme because his situation was nightmarish, but we can see that his acknowledgement of God as creator and sustainer leads him to push for answers. His faith frees him to doubt. His belief allows him to question. His example can encourage us to seek new ways of thinking and envisioning.

Perhaps Captain Tom Moore is England's vision of the year encompassed into one incredible man: a centenarian deeply committed to action, concerned with the welfare of others above any doubts that may be held about his own well-being, a vision of hope and perseverance. But at the same time, a symbol of a nation that has become unjust – a place where our billionaires have increased their wealth by 27% this year, while we require the fundraising efforts of the very elderly to bring money into the NHS to provide care for those whose own health has been badly affected by the pandemic. And we know that any injustice in our own nation is mirrored or even amplified in other places. This pandemic is very likely to have shaken some of us out of our old patterns of thought and belief, about economics, sustainability, equality, and faith.

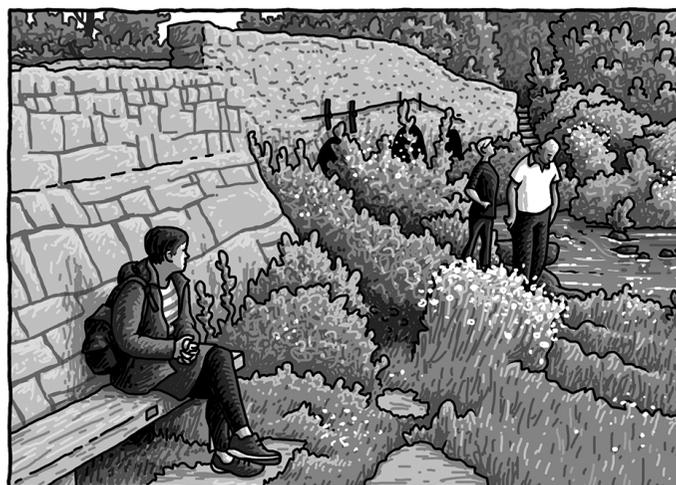
3b 10min

When Jesus was in the wilderness, he went without any food for forty days and nights. Matthew's account says that at the end of the fast, Jesus was unsurprisingly famished. But when the figure of Satan comes forward and encourages Jesus to turn the stones to bread, we can recall Jesus' response; 'one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4).

In the face of provocation, Jesus remains committed to God. But these stories are known as the temptations of Jesus. He would not have been unaffected by those words and ideas. The story would not have been worth recording and sharing if Jesus had not been challenged in his attitudes by what came his way in the guise of Satan. Like so many of the stories about Jesus, this was a crossroads for him.

Thinking again about telling your stories, either ones you have considered before, or ones that have recently come to mind:

- Does your story involve a change of attitude? What does that change feel like?
- If not, does your story involve a persistence? Why did that happen?



3c 15min

Video interview Liz

3d 10min

What words come to mind when you hear this story?

In which ways is this story different to your own?

What will you take away from hearing this story?

3e 12min

Paul writes 'if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here' (2 Corinthians 5:17). As we grow and change throughout our lives, we might shift some of our beliefs and understandings, but also may hold on to others.

- What beliefs remain with you now from earlier in your life? Can you remember a time before them, or have they always seemed to be fully formed? Are there any beliefs you heard in the video that struck you as interesting or valuable?
- What do you trust in, and what can help you to trust? Is there anything that you have stopped trusting? Is there anything you have found new trust in?
- Is there anything that has changed in your approach to life, society or people, or that you might want or need to change?

3f 3min

The story of his baptism and time in the wilderness shows that even Jesus was on a pathway of growth and change. Paul acknowledges that we all thought 'like a child' when we were children, but we can expect to develop our thoughts. However, a mindset that is about growing and changing is sometimes frowned upon amongst faith groups. Stories, by their very nature, often have a narrative of refinement, or a wholesale shift. So, it is to be expected that in as momentous a year as this one, we may well develop new and different thoughts.

3g 10min

Wider question for the group...

- How does change make you feel?
- How do stories about change make you feel?

3h 10min

As people who have engaged with faith in this most significant time...

- Where do you think prayer and silence could help?
- What does prayer look like in these circumstances?
- Is there anything that I want, expect, need from the Holy Spirit?

3i 2min

To finish: a time of prayer:

Ever faithful God, as change comes, be our refuge, but also our catalyst. Guide us through uncertainty, and help us to know you through both good and hard times. Amen

