

- 9.30am Spot the difference! Did you notice all 8?
 - Was it easy or difficult?
- Some things are easy to notice when they are different but others are much harder.
 - How good are you at noticing things about yourself?
 - Without looking: What colour socks are you wearing?
 - Are your finger nails clean?
- Often things to do with how you're feeling are much harder to notice about yourself. Are you good at that?
 - When you are having a grumpy day, is it your fault or everybody else's fault?
 - When you don't want to do something, your homework, the washing up, going for a walk? ... is it because there is something more important to do, or because you'd rather sit around with your friends or because you went to bed too late watching netflixes?
 - Are you the sort of person whose diet always starts tomorrow, but strangely, tomorrow never comes?
- Do you notice these things about yourself or do you just plough on and do what your feelings tell you?
- Lent is a time for noticing.
 - Think of Jesus in the wilderness. We know how long he was by himself in the desert, don't we! 40 days and 40 nights. We know that he was there to think about his mission to the world he loved. We know that he managed because of his reliance on his Father.
 - Did you notice how the bible said he started off, full of the Holy Spirit. After all he'd just been baptised by John the Baptist and the Spirit had settled on him like a dove.
 - And when you're on your own, you think a lot. You've no one to talk to except yourself and God.
 - And Jesus thought and he prayed and he not surprisingly got rather hungry and uncomfortable. No food, no bath, no clean clothes.
 - Quite a testing time.
- His relationship with God his father is what was being tested. Little voices kept coming into his head. It doesn't really matter whether you think these voices were from the devil or not, the end result is the same.
 - And Jesus noticed the temptations, and that they were temptations, and that they would damage the relationship between him and his Dad.
- And we know how he stood up to them. He relied on the word of God. The bible. It gave him strength and direction.
- Christians believe the bible is not just another book full of wisdom
- Christians believe the bible is the inspired word of God. Not that it is necessarily all true. Indeed there are some bits that I really hope are not factually true. But that it contains truth and by reading it we hear the voice of God, speaking to us in our situations, helping us to notice more about ourselves, pointing us in directions that lead to life, life in all its fullness.
- And that's why Jesus said, *'One does not live by bread alone.*
- So Jesus listened to himself and his emotions and desires. He noticed and he used scripture as a weapon to combat these selfish desires.
 - If you think you do not know enough about the bible to use it as a weapon, join one of our Lent groups and start to discover the its power. Start to listen to the voice of God through the bible.
- Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness. We have just begun our 40 days of Lent. Lent for us is a time for noticing. It is at its most valuable this way. As such it is an intensely practical time.

- At school this week at a rather chaotic Ash Wednesday service I asked how many children thought they spent too much time on screens. Over half put their hands up. Maybe Lent is a time for both children and adults to notice this and consider whether they have got a healthy life balance.
- Buying fruit and veg that has travelled from the other side of the world is not good for the environment. Maybe Lent could be a time to make a positive effort to notice where your food comes from or how it is wrapped and to buy more locally, or with less plastic, or more fair trade produce?
- If you're anything like me it is very easy to go straight through the day without ever really saying a prayer or stopping to consider what you think is important or ethical about your decisions. Maybe Lent could be a chance to aim to spend a couple of minutes each day reviewing your day and the decisions you have made and asking God to open your eyes a bit more clearly?
- And the next time you feel grumpy, or annoyed or upset, or ignored, notice it. Maybe Lent is a time to consider what you could do to improve the relationship next time, rather than just feel aggrieved about what others have done?
- I say it again, if all this confuses you, then relating it to the word of God in the bible is the best way I know to make sense of it.
- And just in case you think it is all Christian elitism and self-obsession? Remember the focal point of all this. Not ourselves. But Jesus Christ, who is the lead character in both our readings today, and who the bible says dies and rises again to bring us eternal life. Calling us eternal life today, giving us a view of eternity and the things that matter when we are at the fruit and veg counter in Tesco, or late for work and blaming everyone else, or wondering about what to do when we see the many injustices in society today.
 - And that's Lent. And that's practical. And that's following Jesus.
 - Get noticing! Amen.