

5. Quarantine



Our word quarantine comes from the Venetian quarantena. In the 14th century and at the height of the Black Death, quarantena designated the length of isolation which all ships arriving in Venetian ports were obliged to endure before anyone could go ashore. The word means 40 days.

The quarantines which many have faced during our pandemic have been shorter than 40 days but we have all endured what has, in effect, been an extended quarantine for big chunks of the last year. Like the girl in the photo, we've been constrained by the four walls of our homes and have longed wistfully for the freedoms and easy human interactions of pre-COVID days.

Driven there by the Spirit after his baptism, Jesus 'was in the wilderness for 40 days' (Mark 1.13). The number crops up repeatedly in the pages of the Bible. Think Noah and his ark as the rains lash down (40 days and nights) or Moses and his people longing for their own land but trapped in their wanderings (40 years) - just two of many examples where '40' indicates not only a very long time but also a very testing one. Both end with blessing as does Jesus' time in the desert: he leaves his 'quarantine' ready to proclaim God's kingdom come.

How will we leave ours?

Today...

...raise and enrich our expectations, O God,
of how our 'quarantine' might lead to blessing.

Amen