

6. Wilderness



Immediately after Jesus had been baptised, Mark tells us that the same Spirit who'd descended at the Jordan "like a dove", "drove him out into the wilderness" (Mk 1.12). In this painting of 1898, Briton Rivière takes us there too. He shows us a dejected Jesus, slumped on a rocky outcrop of the Judean desert. And he shows us both the vast reaches of that pitiless landscape and also something of Jesus' internal wilderness. He is utterly alone. Naked feet underline his vulnerability. The weight of the world is on those shoulders.

"Most people's wilderness is inside them, not outside," wrote Harry Williams, monk and theologian. "It is an inner isolation, an absence of contact. It's a sense of being alone and a necessary part of our experience as human beings." (The True Wilderness, 1965)

The isolation of Jesus' wilderness weeks has a sharp new resonance in the light of our lockdown experiences. Some have felt agonisingly alone. Sustained physical separation from other human beings has underscored the existential aloneness which is part of our human condition. It's a separation, therefore, which necessarily, "found a place in the life of the Son of Man." Reassuringly, this aspect of wilderness is both ours and his.

Today...

... as we share your wilderness of isolation,
fill it, O Christ, with your redeeming presence.

Amen