

‘St David? You wouldn’t want to cross him,’
warned former Bishop of St David’s, Wyn Evans.

‘Extremely austere,

fiercely vegetarian,

fiercely ascetic,

not very much in favour of women.

He wasn’t a comfortable or kindly man.

Not a man for today’s tastes.

But what he did do was to found many monasteries
and spread the word of God very vigorously.’

Never mind the corona virus

David must have caught being fiercely ascetic from Jesus,

fasting for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness,

sunbeams scorching all the day,

chilly dew drops nightly shed,

prowling beasts about thy way
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.

The Judean wilderness

ain't going to get 5 stars on Trip Advisor.

By the way, what are you doing for Lent?

It was a withdrawal from society

in the spirit of John the Baptist and other wild men,

followed by an exchange with Satan,

shades of *Good Omens* topped with delirium.

Actually the conversation could well have been in

the Garden of Gethsemane rather than the wilderness,

at the end rather than beginning.

I've written a couple of dozen sermons on the Temptations,

but I'm still not quite sure what is going on.

I would dearly love to turn stones into bread
to feed the starving millions, all God's children.

It would be acutely insensitive to say to those who starve,
'Never mind, God's word is more important than bread.'

When my day trained for ordination in the 1960s
we had to live on just £100 a year
and we had to miss meals.

Years later I discovered a note in my dad's file,
proposing to double his grant.

'No, a little holy poverty will do them good!'
an archdeacon had scrawled.

To those in the West who are overweight if not obese,
Jesus' words are very apposite:

'There's more to life than food or drink or clothes.'
You are fat on food, thin on God.'

And what about throwing yourself off the temple pinnacle
to jumpstart God into protecting yours truly,
a grandstand performance for his faithful servant?

Well, you're deluded.

If God didn't spring Jesus from the cross,
why should he rescue you?

God isn't at the bottom of the tower waiting to catch you,
he's with you at the top,
screaming at you to stop being such a blithering idiot.

And all the kingdoms of the world?

We all lust after power,
be it political power, ecclesiastical power, family power,
the power of being a media celebrity - what a turn!

A false God,

as the Caroline Flacks of this world realise.

Uneasy lies the head which wears the crown -
or the mitre.

That's my take on the temptations sprung in the wilderness.

Whether Jesus or St David

it's good to withdraw, catch your breath,
in order that you may then come back.

The good bishop Wyn

carbon tested the bones of fiercely ascetic St David,
venerated in St David's Cathedral,
clinging on for dear life to Wales' western tip.

'They were in fact the medieval bones
of three different people, mixed up together,
one of them probably female.

Which would have been a big problem for David...'

Actually I think it's rather nice that David,
legendary champion of the little ones and little things
connected rather than disconnected in the end.
Christ's 40 day and night disconnection in the wilderness
put him off being John the Baptist for good,
and instead sprang the world's ultimate connections
with the blind, the deaf, the lame, the leper, the dead.
All those cast out by the world were cast in by Him.
There's your agenda for Lent.

Well captured by David Gwennalt Jones' poem *Dewi Sant*:

I saw Dewi
strolling from country to country like God's gypsy
with the Gospel and the Altar in his caravan:
and coming to us in the colleges and schools
to show us what is the purpose of learning.

He went down to the bottom of the pit with the miners
and cast the light of his wise lamp on the coal-face.

On the platform of the steel works

he put on the goggles and the little blue shirt

and showed the Christian being purified

like metal in the furnace;

and led the proletariat to his unrespectable Church.

He carried his church everywhere, as a body,

life, brain and will that did little and great things.

He brought the Church to our homes

and took bread from the pantry

and bad wine from the cellar,

and stood behind the table like a tramp,

so as not to hide the wonder of the Sacrifice from us.

And after the Communion we chatted by the fireside,

and he talked to us about God's natural order,

the person, the family,

the nation and the society of nations,

and the Cross

keeping us from turning any one of them into a god.