

## First Sunday in Lent, 2016



“Jesus, Bear Grylls and Lent...”

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

As I reflected upon the Gospel passage this week past I was immediately transported back to the Cedarberg which has become somewhat of a haven for Shannon and I at year end. It is a place we go to in order to escape the grind of the city, to enjoy the river and mountains as God intended, an opportunity to replenish the soul and to reflect on the year that was and the year to come.

This past trip was slightly different in that for the first time in ten years one of Shannon's high school friends was camping in the same venue as us. This was a wonderful opportunity for Shannon to spend some time with her friend and also to give her tired Dad some time for a siesta in the afternoons. What became obvious after a short while is that her friend's Dad was hyper energetic! If he wasn't hiking up and down mountains he was canoeing and if he wasn't hiking or canoeing he was dragging heavy equipment down to the river and building zip lines... I laughingly suggested around the camp fire one evening that the Cedarberg now had their own Bear Grylls!

Which started me thinking about Jesus in the wilderness... for those of you who are not familiar with Bear Grylls, now documented on a popular television programme, he is extremely well-trained and experienced in solo wilderness survival, something that our Lord did over two thousand years ago for forty days. I began to reflect about what it took to survive in the wilderness for forty days... no mean feat.

Bear was born in 1974. He is a British adventurer, writer and television presenter. He is ex-SAS Regiment, has climbed Mount Everest, survived a parachute accident... this is a person who has self-discipline, integrity and an ability to understand nature in a deep and profound way.

I began to realise that perhaps reading up on Bear Grylls and understanding his mindset might help me appreciate what our Lord Jesus Christ went through in his forty days of solitude, reflection and prayer.

Bear Grylls routinely faces big challenges and overcomes them... he suggests some guidelines for success in the wilderness.

Firstly, Bear says that it is vital not to listen to haters. Be your own person. The key to your future success is going to be embracing the very same things those dream-stealers are warning you about: the failure, the heartache and the tears. Jesus is and was His own person. He followed His own heart. He was not swayed by popular opinion or the warnings of others. He followed His own dream and remained loyal to His Father. There was no doubt many people who tried to warn Him against his

taking his period of solitude in the desert. He went anyway. Romans 12:2 reminds us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testifying you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Secondly, Bear encourages people training for survival to take the first step now. Take the first step in faith. We cannot predict every obstacle in life, but every step taken in faith will take us one step closer to our goal. 2 Corinthians 5:7 reminds us that, “We live by faith, not by sight.” Jesus knew not the complexities and suffering of all that His journey would take Him through, yet He stepped forward in faith so that we might ultimately be saved.

Thirdly, Bear calls his students to be enthusiastic. This is what sustains you when the going gets tough and it also encourages those around you. As Christians we are called to remain enthusiastic about Christ and the message of the Gospel, even when the going gets tough. Being a Christian is NOT always a walk in the park; it requires commitment, perseverance and strength through the Holy Spirit. Colossians 3:23 reminds us, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.”

Fourthly Bear teaches his students to say “Yes” instead of “No”. Serendipity and opportunity often come from opening these doors. Jesus said “Yes” to His Father’s plan. He did not say “No”. As Christians we need to say “Yes” to the message of the Gospel, “Yes” to the Holy Spirit empowering our lives and “Yes” to the authority of the Father in our lives.

Fifthly, Bear instructs his survival students to never give up. Finish what you started. Jesus did. Even though it cost Him His life. Do we have the tenacity to never give up as well, in spite of adversity. Jesus stuck out the forty days and forty nights in the desert. This took immense self-discipline and sacrifice. As Christians we too are called to apply these values in our lives every day. Philippians 1:6 reminds us, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Sixthly, Bear writes that in order to survive the wilderness you need to pack light and be prepared. Leave behind your old baggage. What a powerful message for us as Christians too! We are already forgiven of our sins through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, why then do so many of us insist on carrying our baggage of hurt and pain from our past around with us? Let it go. Let Jesus carry our past. Move on with your life in and towards the light so that we may be free in Christ and grow in likeness. Being prepared for us as Christians means fasting, praying, worshipping and reading the Bible regularly. Colossians 4:2 reminds us: “Devote yourself to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving”.

Lastly Bear trains his pupils to give before you get. If you want to receive then you must be prepared to give as well. Jesus already gave His life for us. As Christians we have already been blessed with this beautiful gift. How much more then should we be giving back to our fellow person and society? Acts 20:35 reminds that: “I have showed you all things, how that so labouring you ought to support the weak, and to

remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Many of you are probably wondering if Bear Grylls is a Christian.

Yes, he is. He is not shy about his Christian faith and often refers to it as the “backbone” of his life.

What he has shown us is the type of mindset that it takes to survive in solitude and in isolation from civilisation, just like our Lord Jesus did in His forty days of solitude. It takes a strong, disciplined and clear goal orientated mind to succeed in those conditions. It is not a sojourn for the faint-hearted. We have much to take away from this, for it gives us a modern insight into who the person of Jesus may have been and is, namely a focused, committed, disciplined and faithful person who remained true to His heart and desires.

As we begin our Lenten journey, we should take a moment and reflect upon these attributes for they may make us better Christians and ultimately a better person too. Lent is all about deep reflection, giving and meditating. It is not about self, arrogance or being pious. It is about reflecting on our personal journeys of faith in such a way that we might grow closer to our Lord Jesus as we pay it forward within our communities of faith and the world we live in.

Jesus had the self-discipline to remove Himself from the day-to-day grind of life in order to focus upon the will of His Father. It took strength, perseverance and commitment. In spite of our busy and demanding lives, somehow, somewhere, sometime we need to do the same this Lent so that we might have sufficient time-out to reflect.

May God bless you this Lent as you strive to reflect upon your journey of faith so that you may ultimately grow closer to Him.

Amen.