**The Ven Dr Amanda Bloor, Archdeacon of Cleveland, reflects on Luke 4.1-13 for the First Sunday of Lent, 9th March, and International Women's Day.**

What is it that you reach for when you're hungry, I wonder? I suspect that our kitchen cupboards can reveal rather more about us than we'd always want to admit. But we probably all know that being hungry takes up a lot of head space. It's difficult to concentrate, difficult to make good decisions if you're hungry. And of course, for people who have serious difficulties in getting enough to eat, hunger can be life-threatening.

I'm always a little bit daunted by the story told in Luke's Gospel about Jesus in the wilderness at the very beginning of his public ministry. He has eaten nothing at all for 40 days. Even people who are used to fasting as a spiritual discipline would be challenged by that. And it's then, when he's at his weakest physically, that he's faced with some very subtle temptations. ‘Turn this stone into bread so that you can eat. Have this glory, all you have to do is serve me instead of God. Find out if God really loves you by throwing yourself off this high place.’ But Jesus stands firm. Despite his weakened physical state, he's not swayed, he holds on.

Of course, hunger can be about other things, not just food; we can be hungry for change, hungry for justice, hungry for peace, hungry for hope. As we enter into Lent, that time of reflection and preparation, it can be easy to feel hungry for so many things that we can become discouraged. It's a messy and imperfect world, we know that. But one approach is to look for the good news, to look for God's presence, to recognise what God is doing in the world.

And around the world, this weekend, many people will be marking International Women's Day. It's an opportunity to recognise that for many women, life just isn't fair. Experts calculate that if we carry on at the current rate of progress, it's going to take over a century for there to be full gender parity, and that's a pretty depressing thought. But International Women's Day is also a chance to recognise progress and growth, to see where things are better and to be thankful for them, and to recognise that we are all human, we are all part of a worldwide family. There is hope.

I find myself often coming back to that sentence in the book of Isaiah where God says, ‘See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it?’ I know the things I'm hungry for, and they're not going to be solved by reaching for a chocolate biscuit. But alongside that, I see signs of hope everywhere. And my Lenten discipline is going to be to search them out with Christ's help.

I want to offer here a prayer suggested by the Church for us to use during lent, especially with families and children. So, let's pray. God of hope, draw near to us this Lent. Fill us with your joy and peace as we prepare to celebrate all that Jesus did for us at Easter. Amen.