

<b>Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2017</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>Lent 1</b>
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7	Ps 32	Romans 5:12-19
		Matthew 4:1-11
<b>Temptation and Tragedy</b>		

**Lent 2017 Pearls from the Old Testament**  
**The Grace and Mercy of God**

Lent 1 – Genesis 2 & 3 - Temptation and tragedy

Lent 2 – Genesis 12 - God of the covenant and the call of Abram

Lent 3 – Exodus 17 - Water from the rock (Christ, the water of life)

Lent 4 – 1 Samuel 16 - Samuel anoints David and the work of the Holy Spirit

Lent 5 – Ezekiel 37 - The valley of dry bones and the promise of new life

Palm Sunday – Isaiah 50 - The Lord’s suffering Servant

## **INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS**

The book Genesis – the word means “origin” or “beginning” – is part of a series of books that tell the story of a people.

Central themes that emerge:

Only one, supreme God – not many gods and goddesses;

The one God, sovereign in power, created the world with all its inhabitants, animals and humans; it is created with delight, the work of a fine craftsman (not as a result of conflict between forces of good and evil);

Man – human beings – is the climax of creation (“very good”).

“...every human being, male and female” – no matter whether slave or free, rulers or servants, rich or poor – “is created in God’s image to

represent him and exercise dominion on his behalf...”<sup>1</sup> This means that ALL LIFE MATTERS; and ALL LIVES MATTER – whatever our gender, race, age, background. And so we treat all people with respect, courtesy, dignity; all - our neighbours, our enemies - are made in the image of God.

But human beings are both foolish and prone to sinful rebellion against God; they are arrogant, ambitious; they seek to become like God (desire for power and control); they are capable of murderous intentions towards one another (great hatred, rage, fury, violence);

Instead of progress and improvement – as we might expect when we see scientific progress, civilisation, development, growth in knowledge – the book of Genesis “is emphatic that man’s natural tendency is toward waywardness and depravity”<sup>2</sup>, selfishness, cruelty, greed. We have this inbuilt fault, this crack, that however much we patch it, it returns...

**OT reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

## **The big questions**

Genesis 1 and 2 describes the beginning of all things. For many years, the Church saw these chapters as an historical and scientific description of the beginning and origin of the world; we no longer understand these chapters in that way. It used to be believed, based on evidence in the Bible, that the world was created about 6,000 years ago. Now, using other, scientific evidence, we know that the world goes back millions and millions of years, perhaps back to a “big bang”.

Genesis 1 & 2 are not intended to be a historical or scientific description of *how* or *when* the world began, but rather to show us *why*

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<sup>1</sup> Wenham 2003. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. 37

<sup>2</sup> Wenham 2003. 37

and *who*: *why* are we here; *who* is behind it all; *where* do we come from.

It is a story of origin and meaning. It is a picture of a world that was well-made. “And God saw it... and it was good.” The satisfied feeling of a craftsman.

Gen 2 – 3 is a picture of the growing power of sin in the world. And there is a parallel picture of “a hidden growth of grace” (von Rad).

Gen 2-3 address the questions: Why do things go wrong? Where does evil come from? If what God made was very good, and if God had blessed his creation – why is there so much evil around today?

It is a record of what went wrong, and what goes wrong, in our lives and in our world; it shows the angry consequences of human disobedience; it gives words of life and hope for today and tomorrow.

Gen 2:4b-3:24 is a story about two people; a man and a woman, and what happened to them. They are symbols and ancestors of the human race.

The author is saying, “This is what happened.” “This is how human beings behave, and these are the consequences that follow.”

The eating of the fruit is not necessarily a single event in the remote past, but something that is repeated again and again in human history. It can refer to “original sin”; but it also explains our present conditions. God’s intentions and gifts are good, but they are misused. All the wrong in the world, and in our lives, goes back to this.

Xenophobic violence in Gauteng or here in Grahamstown; drug dealing and prostitution; corruption and the abuse of power and resources by the highest in our land; the oppression of the vulnerable and the weak; a culture of rape and sexual violence; broken relationships, broken families; our angry, divided world;

environmental destruction; things we have done or not done that have caused hurt and harm – over the centuries, and here and now, we all have chosen to eat that fruit.

Disobedience to God may bring greater self-knowledge, but it leads to brokenness and to disaster. The relationship with God is broken – as is the relationship with others; with ourselves; and with creation.

## **Genesis 2 – the Garden of Eden**

2:15 the LORD God – LORD – God’s covenant name YHWH; Elohim – the generic name of God used in Gen 1. God the Almighty Creator, mankind’s covenant partner. Intimate.

The garden of Eden – the place of beauty, harmony. “Eden” means “delight” or “well-watered place”. It is a sanctuary, the place where God walks.

In the garden, God provides, for the man to enjoy, “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (2:9) (man is a vegetarian at this stage!); the animals as companions (2:19) – there is no shedding of blood at this early stage; and eventually a wife (2:22).

2:15 - “to till it and keep it” – Adam is given a priestly role: he is to care for the garden, nurturing it, blessing the earth.

God is concerned for his people, for his creation. We are given an idyllic picture of the relationship between the sexes, and between human beings and God.

2:16 – “you may freely eat of any tree of the garden” - God wonderfully provides...

In the garden was...

The tree of life (2:9; 3:22) – which would give life to those who ate from it...

“Wisdom is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.” (Prov 3:18)

“On either side of the river [of the water of life] is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Rev 22:2)

... and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

2:17 - “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” – The divine command, the divine prohibition.

What was this forbidden knowledge that God wished to withhold from man?

The knowledge of all things? Sexual awareness (the man and the woman discovered their nakedness)? Knowing the difference between right and wrong?

OR making decisions without reference to God - moral autonomy. “I am my own master. I can do as I please. I am answerable to no-one. I am free to do as I like.”

Knowledge (in itself) does not lead to eternal life. (Living in harmony with God is what leads to life.)

Knowledge without love/compassion is nothing, cf. 1 Cor 13:1-2 “If I speak of the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries *and all knowledge* [my emphasis]...but have not love, I am nothing.”

A person can have all the knowledge there is, but still be cruel, corrupt, and selfish. Knowledge in itself does not give life.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” (Ps 19:7-9)

All knowledge that we have, or seek after – our thirst for knowledge, our intense curiosity – which is good, part of us – we have schools and universities to further knowledge – must be brought into harmony with God, who is the source of all knowledge, all wisdom.

### **Genesis 3 – the Fall – the breakdown of relationships**

3:1 the serpent – not a supernatural enemy, nor an inner voice. It is one of God’s creatures, but “more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made.” The wrong kind of wisdom; trickery; deceit; half-truths; distortion.

The question of the origin of the serpent’s deceitful intent, its craftiness, is not addressed here. Perhaps it points to the potential for good and evil in what we are given.

The serpent seduces by questioning, rather than challenging. He lures the woman on.

He speaks half-truths: “You will not die... your eyes will be opened and ... be like God” – these statements turn out to be partially true – but at a deeper level they are utterly misleading.

3:6-8 “So when the woman saw that the tree was *good for food*, and that it was a *delight to the eyes*, and that the tree was desired to *make one wise...*” she takes, and gives to her husband, and they both eat.

They are both culpable, liable – not only the woman (1 Tim 2:13-15 sees Eve is the one who led Adam astray, and therefore as the weaker, the more prone to error.)

They do indeed gain knowledge. Their eyes are opened. But what they see is their own nakedness (3:7), their own vulnerability. And so they try to cover themselves: they frantically sew loincloths out of fig leaves. Instead of enjoying their accustomed intimacy with God, they hide from him. They are afraid. They are ashamed. The relationship of trust and openness with God is broken. It is a vivid picture of the aftermath of sin.

And then comes the sad questioning... what have you done? The man blames the woman, the woman blames the snake, the snake does not have a leg to stand on...

“...the extent of the alienation becomes apparent: it is not just between man and God, but between husband and wife, and between the animal and the human world. The serenity of Eden has been lost.”<sup>3</sup>

They are sent away from God’s presence and from the fullness of life in the garden (3:22).

3:14-19 Sin has its immediate consequences, and also its ongoing impact. Pain, suffering. Weariness of labour. Conflict in relationships. Exploitation. Oppression. The struggle for power and control – all symbolised by their expulsion from the garden and the loss of eternal life. Cf. St Paul’s words and reflections on the Fall: “... sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned...” (Rom 5:12)

“Thus in the most significant sense, Adam and Eve did die on the day that they ate of the tree (2:17)... Genesis 2-3 may ... be read as a paradigm [blue-print, picture] of every sin: it describes what happens

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<sup>3</sup> Wenham 2003. 40

every time someone disobeys God. The essence of sin is rejecting God's commands, preferring human wisdom to his. The immediate consequence of sin is disruption of relations, introducing alienation between God and man and between man and man. The long-term effects of sin are toil, pain, blighted relationships, and ultimately death.”<sup>4</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The Fall is not the end of the story. There is a consistent pattern of God's mercy and grace.

The grace and mercy of God unfolds: the call of Abraham; the covenant relationship with God; the eternal relationship of love.

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” (Jer 31:3). The grace and mercy of God holds us – always.

“... a Christian is not so much someone who does things for God, but someone who realises, like Mary, that ‘the Mighty One has done great things for me.’ (Lk 1:49)”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wenham 2003, 41

<sup>5</sup> Binz 2010. 13