

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7; Romans 5.12-19.  
Evensong - Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2015.

*May the Lord now be in all our hearts, and upon my lips, that every thought and word may be wholly for the honour and glory of his name.*

I find the story of the fall of humankind as told in Genesis deeply significant. I don't think it really happened in precisely the way that Genesis describes it. We know that this story has roots in an ancient Babylonian text. We may read the Creation stories in a metaphorical sense, but whatever credence we give them, they do carry a great deal of relevance for each of us, especially during Lent, as we struggle to begin, maintain and grow a relationship with God, a God who is always coming half-way to meet us.

Genesis describes how, through disobedience to God's will, Adam & Eve lost their innocence and were expelled from paradise. For me, this reflects the sad truth that humanity tends towards selfishness, that we are repeatedly inclined to fall away from God, that we do not exist in a state of perfect harmony with him, with each other, or with his Creation.

Equally, I find the explanation Paul offers in ch.5 of Romans of what happened from Adam's first trespass to Moses law, and the difference offered us by Christ, as being of the utmost importance. Paul believes that, before Christ, humanity created a sinful world for itself by the trespass of Adam & Eve, and all our trespasses since. The people of Israel reacted by placing all their faith in the law of Moses, and forgot that this was meant to be the law of a loving God.

Unbridled law brings along with it a spirit of condemnation to make us pay for our sins - but then we heard how the serpent was the craftiest creature around. By way of contrast and through Christ, Paul believes all is reconciled with God through what he describes as a free gift for the many. In other words, he lays out the agenda for the belief in universal salvation. The free gift does not have the same effect as the original sin – it denies condemnation and overcomes the fear of hell and death. In the end, nothing will keep us from the love of God (Romans 8:39).

For those of you who follow my social media Twitter account, you will know that I describe myself as a Universalist, i.e. one who believes that God saved all of humanity through his incarnation as Christ, and not just those who call ourselves Christian. In the obedience of Christ, God defeated death and threw down the gates of hell for all time.

This doesn't mean that there is no such thing as hell any more; humankind is adept at making hell for itself whenever it acts out of greed, vengeance, selfishness or pride. We make hell for ourselves whenever we are tempted to act like God or go against the will of God. This is the pathway to spiritual death. But through God's grace and his gift of faith, death has no dominion now; we have now the justification of an open door to heaven – we just have to believe that the invitation remains open, like the door - that Christ left it open for everyone – that this is Christ's pathway of love to life - the way, the truth and the eternal life.

*Spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>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 First Sin and Its Punishment

# 3

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' <sup>6</sup>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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

## Romans 5.12-19 Adam and Christ

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— <sup>13</sup>sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. <sup>16</sup>And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. <sup>17</sup>If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. <sup>19</sup>For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

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