

A matter of death and life

The early chapters of Genesis, the story of the creation and the fall, is a part of the bible that I haven't preached on. They are a part of the bible that people view in different ways. Is it factual? Is it true? Is it metaphorical or allegorical?

Several years ago, I was visiting a church, and after the service a fellow came up to me, quite irate, and said "You don't still believe that Garden of Eden rubbish do you? No one with any sense does!"

I was perplexed, I hadn't preached on the Garden of Eden, and it took me a moment to realise that the prayer of adoration had included the line "Eternal God, it was your love that birthed humankind, and placed them in a garden." No one else had commented on it, but this fellow had latched on to it, and was so upset by it, that he hadn't listened to anything else I'd said.

No matter how you might regard them though, these chapters are part of our scripture, and as Paul said, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16-17)

So I hope that we can look at them, and learn from them together, even if we have different views about how these stories came to have been included in our scriptures.

Our reading from Genesis, was the story of Adam's sin, technically Adam and Eve's Sin, and it's often called 'original sin', with the idea that all people are sinful because Adam (and Eve) first sinned.

We read that God created human beings in his own image (Genesis 1:27): In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Then God gave them a special place in creation and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28)

But God also gave them a rule: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:16)

And of course, they ate from that tree. They had one rule to follow, and they broke it.

The serpent had something to do with it of course, but, as we heard in the reading, the serpent didn't make them eat it. The serpent suggested what God had told them about the tree wasn't true, and questioned why God gave them the rule about not eating from it.

He made eating the fruit sound not only not harmful, but good for them. It'll be a good outcome, and no one will mind. Have another drink, and you'll be okay to drive home. Just take this bribe, it's not harming anyone. Your wife wouldn't mind. No one will ever find out.

Both Adam and Eve gave into temptation.

Paul writes to the Romans 5:12 that, when Adam sinned, sin entered the world. – and through sin, death, for all people.

It doesn't seem fair, does it? Adam (and Eve) sinned. And we live with the consequences – or more accurately, we die with the consequences.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world, and death entered the world. Up to that point there had been no envy, no greed and no disobedience. Everything was good – it was the way God intended this to be.

And then Adam and Eve chose something else. They chose the wrong thing.

We all do. I think we see it in our lives and across the world. People do the wrong thing. People hurt each other. Our natural inclination, it seems, is to do the wrong thing. To be selfish. To be greedy and proud. Adam and Eve might have done it first, but don't we do the same thing? Put ourselves before others? Put ourselves before God?

We can watch the TV news, and see reports of problems all over the world. Natural disasters in Turkey, Syria and New Zealand, war in Ukraine, the rising cost of living all over the place, the latest strain of Covid which is worse than the last, domestic violence, homelessness, and on it goes. We who are Christians often say, "well, we live in a fallen world". And we do. We definitely do. Sometimes we might say "There but for the grace of God go I", but that can leave us wondering why we get the grace of God, but those poor suffering people don't.

It's easy to dwell on sin and death, but as followers of Jesus we need to realise that there's more to our lives than sin and death. Just like two weeks ago, when our reading focused on our wrongdoings we needed to think about our sin in the context of the forgiveness that Jesus offers.

So as we look at today's passage and learn how death came into the world, we need to look further into our reading and see in verse 15 that Paul writes "if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"

And even though we all, by nature, are like Adam and Eve, and choose to turn away from God, we don't have to remain like that. Because God provided the way back. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Paul calls it a gift, because it is freely given to us. We don't have to buy it, or earn it, or sacrifice for it. We simply have to accept it. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of Adam and Eve's sin. Sin led to condemnation and death, but God's free gift leads to our forgiveness, and our reconciliation with God.

People do look at others in less fortunate circumstances than their own and say "There but for the grace of God go I" ... but that's not what the grace of God is about.

God is not some sort of aloof, faraway being that doesn't care. Or that decides that we can receive his grace and others cannot. God sent his son into the world, the fallen world, to bring us back to him. His grace extends to all people – as Paul says in verses 18 and 19, "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

And that grace is there for all people – for us living in comfortable circumstances here in St Ives, for the homeless person in the city of Sydney, for the person in Auckland whose house has been flooded – or those in Turkey or Syria whose homes lie in ruins.

All we need do to receive that grace is to accept the gift that Paul writes about. To turn to Jesus in faith. To answer Jesus' call to follow him... as I said at Jan's funeral on Tuesday, he calls us to follow him all the way through death into everlasting life.

Amen.