

Sermon – Lent 1

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7, Matthew 4:1-11, Psalm 32

Blessed are those whose sin is forgiven: whose iniquity is put away. Amen.

It's been a big week this week. On Wednesday we had three Ash Wednesday services. I think we ashed around 350 children's, teacher's and parent's foreheads at the Grammar School chapel service, and then we had our 10am Ash Wednesday Eucharist followed by the Choral Eucharist in the evening. We also started our Thursday evening Lenten service at 7pm and continued with our Friday eucharist at noon. You'll notice that the church colours have been changed to violet and that we are covering our crucifixes. We are in Lent: the season in which we anticipate the passion of Jesus and then his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. The season in which we are all called to each reflect on the meaning and significance of Jesus in our lives.

On Wednesday, in his sermon, Fr Craig reflected on the readings and raised the theme of hypocrisy, both institutional and individual. He challenged us to look in the mirror, to recognize our own hypocrisy and, this Lent, do something, even something small, to give up some of our hypocrisy. As I reflected on the readings today, the theme was related - temptation. You see, just as hypocrisy separates us from God, so does temptation. This morning, I want to unpack, the meaning of our reading from Genesis and then ask the question, how can we respond to temptation? And I think we can find the answer in our Gospel reading, which is the story about the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. So, this morning, let's look at these two stories and see how they speak to each other.

Our reading from Genesis is the well known and often talked about and interpreted story of humankind being tempted to disobey God's rules. In some ways it's the story of our destiny. Scene 1 has us living in God's world, with God's creatures and on God's terms. This is framed in the first three verses of our reading:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat'.

Here we have God giving humankind a vocation, to live in harmony with creation, to care for creation. And in the 2nd verse God gives us permission to freely eat of every tree in the garden. We are people who can make choices in seeking to nurture and fulfill ourselves. And in the third verse, God puts in a rule: you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, the scene is set. The human task is to hold these three facets of divine purpose together: our responsibility to care for the created world, our freedom to make choices for our wellbeing, and the requirement for us to live within God's boundaries. How do you think we go? Roll on to the next scene!

Well if you look closely at the Genesis reading you might notice that we skip over eight verses to reach the next segment and this is done in our lectionary to contain the reading to this very particular story. And the story is best understood in the context of the three verses we have just read about God's purpose for humankind. What happens then? In the next segment, humankind moves from trust and obedience, to alienation from God. And it's interesting to note the process. The prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is reframed into an option. It goes from being God's given rule to a possibility. And down this slippery slope, humankind tumbles, to playing God and taking life into their own hands. I wonder how often we

too reframe something that we know really isn't right, into an option and then make decisions that disconnect us from God?

This story from Genesis is a profound metaphor for the human condition. Look at our world today. Are we living in harmony with creation? Are we making decisions that nurture ourselves and all God's creatures? Or are we too busy seeking freedom and autonomy and not recognizing appropriate boundaries? Is there a massive disconnect between humankind and our creator God?

So, how can we respond to this seemingly hopeless human condition?

Well, we only have to look at today's Gospel reading to understand. Jesus provides us with the template as to how to respond to temptation. And it really is a mirror of the reading from Genesis, except the primary character, Jesus, shows us how to deal with the slippery slope of rationalization that we all too often get ourselves stuck on.

How is Jesus tempted? He is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and, in echoes of the Israelites in the wilderness, he fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. He is famished. And he responds to the tempter's suggestion to turn the stones into bread by saying "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." There is more to our lives than satisfying our hunger for food. There is God's purpose for us.

Then Jesus is led up to the temple and challenged to test God's word and he responds by saying "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus does not bargain with or rationalize God's purpose for him.

And then he is led up to a high place and given the option of the world and Jesus says "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Again, Jesus is able to focus on the important and not get distracted by the appeal of power.

In this Gospel reading we have the perfect counterpoint to the story from Genesis. Where humankind fails to trust God in Genesis, Jesus succeeds in the Gospel to the point where, trusting God, he will die on the cross and then marvelously be resurrected three days later, ultimately restoring us all to life. Jesus is the antidote for our doubts, our lack of trust, our temptations, our hypocrisy. As we are all tempted in our own lives, every day I expect, let's use the way that Jesus showed us in this reading to make good decisions about how we live our lives. Let's remember God's purpose for us, our vocation to care for creation, to nurture all of God's creatures and to live within God's boundaries. This Lent, let's give up testing God, let's listen to his word and truly worship and serve him.

Let us pray:

Loving and Gracious God, as we journey through Lent, grappling with your word, trying to understand your will for each and every one of us, send your Spirit to lead us, so that we can live in this world as you would want us to, with generosity, love and kindness, and always trusting in you.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.