

Winchester Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
Service at Home - Sunday February 18 2024
prepared by Rev John Archer

Introduction

Two of the lectionary lessons suggested for this week are the story of the Garden of Eden and the apple tree, and the story of Noah and the great flood. The overwhelming majority of Christians accept them as myths, with close parallels in other Middle East religious writings. They are brilliant examples of finding deep truths about God, creation, man and failure set in the form of a story. These stories have had (and still have) a powerful meaning for thousands of years. They are not meant to be treated literally. I have today chosen the story from Genesis 2 & 3 about "The Fall" to explore in today's service. As this is the first Sunday in Advent, this will be reflected in our prayers.

Read, sing or pray *Majesty, worship his majesty* **StF 333**

[06. Majesty, Worship His Majesty: Written by Jack Williams Hayford \(youtube.com\)](#)

Majesty, worship his majesty;
unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.
Majesty, kingdom authority,
flows from his throne unto his own,
his anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus,
magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King.
Majesty, worship his majesty,
Jesus, who died, now glorified,
King of all kings.

Jack Hayford

Opening Prayers

Gracious God our heavenly Father, on this first Sunday of

Lent we come together to worship you.
to praise and thank you, to seek your forgiveness
and to ask for renewal.

We come in the name of Christ
remembering his lonely days in the wilderness
his time of wrestling with temptation
and the ministry that followed,
restoring and transforming so many lives.

Help us to learn from his example
to search our hearts as he did,
to consider our calling,

to reflect on our faith,
to resist temptation,
and to commit ourselves more wholly to you.
Help us to recognise all that Jesus has done for us
through his life, death and resurrection;
and so may we come gladly to you,
confessing our sins,
Create in us a clean heart, O Lord and put a right spirit
within us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen

We pray The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for
ever and ever. Amen.

Bible Reading 1. Genesis 2 : 15 – 3 : 14

Read, sing or pray *God in his love for us lent us this planet* **StF 727**

[God in his love for us lent us this planet - Singing the Faith 727 \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.
- 2 Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.
- 3 Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have needed,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.
- 4 Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Prayers of Confession

Gracious God we thank you for the example you have shown to us in Christ, the model of faithful service. Forgive us that we so often fail to follow his example, turning a blind eye to what we know is wrong, even bending the rules ourselves. We go along with the crowd, rather than face being thought different. We close our eyes and ears to what we would rather not think about. We make excuses and seek to justify our faults. We give way to temptation promising next time will be different. We wash our hands of difficult decisions, claiming it is none of our business

Gracious God, forgive us those times when we have failed to speak up for right, when we have colluded in wrong, and when we have lost sight of both.

Renew us through your Spirit, restore us through your love, equip us through your power, and so enable us to live faithfully as your people. You challenge us to stand up for what is right

Give us the courage to respond

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Sermon Part 1 “The Fall”

I have a fear of snakes. It stems from an incident in my childhood when I was with my father as he dug over a compost heap on an area of waste land. Suddenly a nest of snakes was uncovered and they slithered and wriggled everywhere. My dad immediately chopped them with his spade but the split parts still wriggled! They were only grass snakes and harmless but I had nightmares for weeks! My son-in-law is from Western Australia where they have some of the most poisonous snakes and spiders on the planet. He has a healthy regard for them!

In scripture as well as the secular world the snake is a symbol of the devil – a power of evil at war with the world. It is not only in primitive and ancient societies that devil worship occurs. Halloween reminds us that witches covens still exist in the New Forest in Hampshire; there are Satan worshippers in the suburbs; tarot cards are in a number of middle class cupboards and ouija boards are sold in some toy shops. We must remember that for everyone for whom such activities are harmless fun, there are others whose mental health has been affected. There is a limmerick which goes

*“God's plan had a hopeful beginning
But man spoilt his chances by sinning
We trust that the story
Will end in God's glory
But at present the other sides winning!”*

The snake (The Devil / temptation) was very clever. Eve knew that God was good, but he causes her to doubt about the one prohibition. He twisted the word embodying freedom to tinge it with a sense of God's meanness.

From “We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the one in the middle.”

To “Did God really tell you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

He was, in effect, saying “If God is as bountiful as you say, and he really cares for our welfare, surely he would not deny us this small thing. God knows we need food and he wants us to delight in his creativity, surely he can't have meant to forbid this one thing?”

When we start down that road we have already gone too far. Temptation often starts with trivia. Often our spiritual health and development depends on the one thing in our lives which blocks our way to God. The serpent reaches the woman at the one small trivial point where she was not ready to give over to the Lord – the moment when we'd rather God did not trouble us! The servant tempts Eve to doubt God's word – its trustworthiness and its truth. This is the taproot down to disobedience. However one redeeming fact remained – that Adam & Eve were not beyond the sound of the divine call. God did not give up on us, as we shall see in a few moments in **Part 2**.

Read sing or pray *From heaven you came helpless babe StF 272*

[From Heaven You Came Helpless Babe \(The Servant King\) \(Singing the Faith 272 / StF 272\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.
This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.

2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

3 Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Bible Reading 2 John 3 : 13 – 21

Sermon Part 2. "The Re Creation"

The passage in John's gospel is Genesis revisited
Genesis starts "In the beginning God"
John starts "In the beginning the word"
Genesis is about creation and the beginning of life
John is about re creation and the beginning of eternal life

In Genesis the Lord God said "Let there be light" but, as we heard earlier the light went out. Again it was dark -spiritually. God's creation had freely rebelled and preferred darkness. They were again formless and void without light. Again it was our God who moved "Let there be light". This time it was not light from the SUN but light from the **SON**. Re creation was made possible.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life"

This is often spoken of as the greatest sentence ever.. It says something about.

God's Motive

He so loved the world. Jesus didn't die to change God's mind. Not trying to keep us out, but trying to get us in.

God's Method

He gave. It points us back to the manger at Bethlehem and forward to the cross on Calvary. He acts out God's love for us. We know the way to God because he sent Jesus.. Would you believe a person wanted you to visit if he never invited you. But Jesus does. "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will go in and eat with him and he with me."

God's Message

"Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life"

"I came to seek and to save what was lost"

"I have come that they might have life"

God loves us all ,but salvation only becomes effective if we believe and put our trust in him. A life jacket is little use to us when we are in water trouble,if we do not put it on and trust it!

Jesus coming gives each of us the chance to be re created (redeemed). To accept God's gift of love is to be saved, to refuse is to be judged. The choice is ours.

Amen

Read sing or pray *Jesus the name high over all* **StF 357**

[Jesus the Name High Over All \(Lydia\) \(Singing the Faith 357 / StF 357\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 Jesus -- the name high over all,
in hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
and devils fear and fly.
- 2 Jesus -- the name to sinners dear,
the name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven.
- 3 Jesus -- the prisoner's fetters breaks,
and bruises Satan's head;
power into strengthless souls it speaks,
and life into the dead.
- 4 O that the world might taste and see
the riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
would all the earth embrace.
- 5 His only righteousness I show,
his saving grace proclaim;
'tis all my business here below
to cry:'Behold the Lamb!'
- 6 Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayers for Others

Firstly a time of quiet when we silently pray for those close to us who are in need of support; those in our circuit, lay and ministerial, who bear the burden of leadership in difficult times; and then remember the trouble spots of our world where the situation seems at the moment hopeless, that God may find a way around the human stumbling blocks to bring some healing and peace.

Then at the beginning of Lent we pray for those experiencing times of testing in the wilderness of life today.

We pray for those facing difficult and demanding choices, especially in governments

Choices which may involve pain and sacrifice, letting go of cherished dreams or policies.

We pray for those individuals wrestling with temptation, unsure of where they stand, uncertain about their ability to stand firm in the wilderness of life today.

Heavenly Father give us true humility and meekness of spirit, so that we may be ready to listen and examine ourselves, ready to ask searching questions about who we are, and to change where necessary.

Teach us to face the truth, for the truth will set us free.

In the name of Christ.

Amen

Read sing or pray *Come let us sing of a wonderful love*

StF 443

[Come Let Us Sing of a Wonderful Love \(Tune: Wonderful Love - 4vv\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.
- 2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.
- 3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?

Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

- 4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831-1905)

The Blessing

Now may the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and those you represent, now and always.

Amen

Acknowledgements

Prayers from All Seasons – Nick Fawcett

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