

## Sermon for Sunday 12 February 2023

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent

**Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3; Romans 8: 18 – 25; Matthew 6: 25 – end**

#### The Goodness of God

What a wonderful and uplifting start to our readings today to hear again the story of Creation. Again and again in our reading we're told that God saw what He had created, and "it was good". The description of creation is stately, almost hymnlike – but the same time full of excitement and joy. God keeps on creating one thing, and then moving on to something else – dry land – plants – sea creatures – birds – animals of all kinds and finally – human beings. Something that is as like Himself as possible. And then, what does he do with all of this glorious profusion of life? He gives it away to humankind so that we can be responsible for everything else. Because God knows all about the joy of creating, of sharing and of giving things away. He took an enormous risk when He gave it all to us, and gave

us the capacity to choose how we would respond and what we would do.

We don't have to take the story of Adam and Eve, the apple and serpent literally to see how well it illustrates what we human beings are like. We too are risk-takers, and we like to be in control, and we have a tendency to learn – or not - by our mistakes. We often listen to the wrong voices; and we're not always very good at obeying God's rules.

Rather than nurturing creation, living in harmony with it, we have, for most of human history, exploited it. We've wanted to get the most out of it for our own purposes. Only now are we beginning to realise the damage we have done, and the need to behave differently if we want to avoid our planet becoming uninhabitable for us all.

The story of Creation in Genesis shows us how things were meant to be. Our passage from Paul's letter to the Romans moves us on quite a long way through human history reflecting how things are. We are surrounded by suffering. Who

hasn't been affected this week by the scenes of devastation from towns and cities across Turkey and Syria following the earthquake. The grief and despair, the rubble, and the joy as survivors are brought out alive. We have our own personal earthquakes too when ill-health or tragedy of other kinds strikes us without warning.

Paul acknowledges the suffering. He says not only human beings, but creation itself is suffering because it is in bondage to decay. Death and dying, hardship and distress were not in God's plan for Creation. They arrived because of humankind's disobedience to God. There is a hint of this in the ending of the story of Adam and Eve. We can see the results of human disobedience to God's way of love in much of the suffering around us. Our selfishness and greed, our tendency to fight one another rather than to work together. Even some of our diseases come from living in ways that do not respect nature.

Other things – natural disasters in particular – are harder to explain. Did our planet have to have a hot core which is not stable? Did God have to

create a world where earthquakes would happen – suddenly and without warning? These are hard questions. But certainly with our modern knowledge of tectonic plates we don't have to choose to live in an earthquake zone – except that in practice many people don't have that kind of choice. And then there are questions beginning to be asked about the buildings. Were they properly constructed? How much have we humans contributed to this particular catastrophe?

Paul doesn't dwell on the suffering of the present because he is looking further ahead to the end of time and the bringing to fulfilment of everything in Jesus. He wants to encourage us to lift our eyes from present struggles and to see the bigger picture. We have been saved by Jesus who has rescued us and the whole of Creation from death and decay by his life, death and resurrection. We have the promise that God will restore the whole of Creation to its original goodness. We are children of God and co-heirs with Jesus. But we have not yet reached the glorious new creation. Like a woman in labour we, together with

everything else, have to wait patiently and endure the pain until the new life arrives. But we wait in hope. And meanwhile we have the Holy Spirit within us as the sign and foretaste of our new life. The Holy Spirit who is the great communicator between God and his creation; the Holy Spirit who helps us to pray.

God has not left our world alone in this time between the coming of Jesus, and the final resolution of all things. I'm certain that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus walks with His compassion and love through those devastated towns, hearing the cries of the desolate, working in and through those who are seeking and saving and rescuing.

He is no less certainly with us, in whatever we might be facing, reminding us not to be anxious. "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he says, and all these things will be given to you as well." In other words, "Let me be at the centre of your life, as it was always supposed to be when I first made human beings. And I'll take care of all the rest."

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Amen

*Revd Diana Young*