

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

9th September 2018

Genesis 3:1-24

Spirit... love us back into life... not just its existence... but its meaning... its morality... its imagination... that dares us to engage with the world and with each other... Come and inspire us to live beyond where we are now... So be it... Amen

I had a friend who once came up with an idea... which I think is revolutionary... and I have shared it with a few people in the congregation...

When visiting a theme regularly comes to the surface of our conversations... and that is some comment about the state of the world... the way we seem to be floating without any anchors to hold onto... into unknown future... which in itself isn't a bad thing... you don't have to know the future... but we have become frightened of this future... because there seems to be moral leadership from institutions... or markets... or politics and even church...

Anyway... before I give the sermon away... back to the revolutionary idea... Live your life backwards... It's great...

Retire first... Start by enjoying all the comforts and freedom retirement can bring... Once you have enjoyed yourself... go on and do your job... and by moving backwards... by the time you get to your education... you'll know what you should have studied... to do the job you've just done... That would make exams much more purposeful... Only then do you grow into a child... and not worry about things so much any more... people keep saying your worries just grow in life... This way they stop... you'd be satisfied with a DVD of Peppa Pig and an afternoon nap...

Of course that's not how it works... what happens is we grow up... and need to acquire the skills to help us cope with the reality of the world... and we do that by gaining the morals and values that help us shape the world...

But that doesn't always happen either... Going back to that routine conversation that is often shared... we don't necessarily feel better equipped to face the world today... In fact we seem to just worry more about it... because we don't feel institutions... markets or

community have the values or morals to enable it to better itself... In fact those morals have been out of fashion for quite some time...

So let's go back to the beginning... the very beginning... and the garden... and read this beginning story... as one that was written to offer... insight into the human condition... a story that speaks into who we are... and reveals something about ourselves...

Traditionally... though not always... this story is known as the story of The Fall... God said "Don't eat of the fruit"... but the first couple did... persuaded by the serpent... and their eyes were open... they became self-aware... that they were naked... so they clothed themselves... aware of their differences... and were ultimately expelled from Eden...

So significant was this first sin... it has affected every human ever since... and every one of us is born into sin... and we rely on Jesus ... the Second Adam... to save us and lift us from that sin...

That's the way Christians... since the 2C... have traditionally interpreted that story... through the writings of Irenaeus and Augustine... who themselves were more influenced by Hellenistic thought rather than Hebrew thought... But are there more positive interpretations of the story...

For example... a Jew... would not hear the idea of sin and fall in this story... and many Christians don't either... What they hear is the moment the first ones grow up... Up to this point... they are looked after... like children... Everything is there for them... they are naked and unaware of it... they are different from each other... but have no sense of that... until they eat the fruit...

Then everything changes... Then they realise they are different... and make clothes for themselves... They become self aware... God's threat that they would die if they ate the fruit... is only partially correct... What dies... is innocence... and what they gain... is insight... maturity... they see the world now in a different way... their eyes are opened...

Sin and fall are no where mentioned in this story... It is a story about growing up... which is what we all do... We all eventually eat the fruit... as individuals... and as communities and society... It would be nice to live backwards... and leave all those responsibilities

behind us... but the world works the other way around... and we only gain responsibilities...

But in doing so... and the Bible teaches us this... in every page after the fruit eating... we need morals and values... in order to own that responsibility... What ideals shall we shape... what rituals shall we be guided by... to go along with that maturity...?

And that... perhaps... is where we have a meltdown in the west at the moment... That conversation I regularly have with folk... that in politics... in economy... in faith... morals seem to unfashionable... We are in a time... where self-interest... personal gain and value... have higher worth than the needs of others... Perhaps that is true in every time... but it seems sharper in this age than in many before...

But Jonathan Sacks... in his Radio 4 series this last week... suggests morality lifts us above self interest... and we do things... that are not just for... or about... 'me'... but we live in a bigger... broader body called community...

Now we have tasted the fruit... we need to take moral responsibility... and perhaps the task of the church now... more than in many an age... is to re-moralise our society... where the gap between rich and poor only widens... where markets only feed the rich... where multi-nationals sue governments for loss of profits... where politics divides us and turns us into collectives... rather than communities...

Do you ever wonder why the mental health of our society... let alone of so many individuals... is so fragile... Partly because... surely... we don't have a sense of collective meaning... of common good... Our sense of worth is defined by personal power and wealth... We've let go the morals that guide us beyond self interest... and towards responsibility for each other... Ours... surely... as people of faith... with the stories and traditions and insights from our faith... is to help re-moralise that society...

But that cartoon memory of the story of Adam and Eve at the tree... munching into an apple... is perhaps a defining story for our age... about growing up... and finding the morals we need to live as adults...

As for us... we focus on our community... We have a vision as a session and congregation... to bring depth again... value again... to hold responsibility for each other... in our parish... always working in partnership with others... to transform our community... to be agents of change... re-moralise with compassion, care welcome, love...

We don't do that on our own... because we need the balance and corrective of a diverse society... but what we give our parish... is the stories that hold the morals... that speak into how communities can be healthy... and safe... and compassionate... again...

We are only one player in that... but as people of faith... along with others of different faiths... that is what we peculiarly bring to society... the resources to re-moralise... The pressure... is going the other way... but we can hold against that... We do not need to devolve responsibility to those institutions that are living backwards... but by our shared diversity and breadth... those who seek a common good... have the "values, rituals and ideals" to offer a future quite different from the one it feels we are heading towards at the moment...

We are very much called to live forwards... to own the morals a mature faith offers... that shape a fairer society... transformed neighbourhoods... and call us to be an outward-living... forward-moving... ever maturing congregation... This is who we are... Come and see...