



World Environment Day 2021 “Where are you?” Genesis Chapter 3: 8-15 by Revd. Preb. Deborah Parsons

The media’s been full of the explosive claims of Dominic Cummings at the Government’s handling of the pandemic. Whether there’s any truth in the allegations will emerge at a public enquiry but it does highlight part of the human condition: To make a mistake is human; to blame it on someone else is even more human.

Today’s reading from Genesis, finds us in the lush Garden of Eden when something has gone badly wrong. God’s out for an evening stroll but suddenly notices a decided absence of human company and calls to Adam: “Where are you?”

Every parent knows that sinking feeling when the house suddenly seems a little too quiet.....and you go to investigate only to discover that your toddler has found the pack of felt tip pens or the tub of Sudocrem and covered themselves, the carpet and the walls.

Instead of harmony and ease, there’s separation and self-consciousness. Adam and Eve want to hide not only their bodies but also the truth of what they’ve done. The shame and blame game begins. Adam blames Eve. “She gave me fruit from the tree.” Eve blames the serpent. “The serpent tricked me.”

A crack has appeared between Creator and Creation. Adam and Eve are no longer at ease with themselves or with their environment....Paradise is lost....but the antidote is also contained within the story as God searches for them: “Where are you?”

The creation stories in Genesis are multi-layered but contain deep truths about the human condition and about the love of God. And the symbolism of Adam and Eve’s names can hardly escape us. Adam comes from the Hebrew *adham*, which means “humankind.” And Eve means: “Mother of all the living.” In other words, the author isn’t telling the story of two particular people but of EVERYONE. This isn’t simply THEIR story; it’s OUR story too. And in a beautiful play on words, *Adham* comes from the Hebrew word *adhamah*, which means “ground” or “dust.” A reminder of our interconnectedness with all creation.

In “Reading the Bible Again for the First Time,” Marcus Borg suggests there are different lenses through which we might read this story. Some may read it as a story of disobedience. God’s seen as a finger-wagging parent. When you don’t follow the rules, there are consequences! Others see it as a story of the dangers of self-centredness and pride. When we behave as if we’re God the results are disastrous. Others see it as a warning of what happens when we allow others to set our agendas. Who are the snakes? The seductive voices that we listen to? Or we may read this as the birth of consciousness. A story of growing up. Of learning good and evil. In the womb we experience unity but the very process of being born results in separation and fragmentation. Our life time’s work is to return to Eden. To reconnect with the experience of oneness and wholeness again.

I was very moved recently by the story of Steven Webb. The new Mayor of Truro. When he was 18, he snuck into Truro School and dived off a wall into their open-air swimming pool. He'd done it many times before but this time it ended differently. He smacked his head on the bottom of the pool and was paralysed for life. He speaks of the shame and embarrassment at causing his own disability, of the joy of meeting Emma and her four-year old daughter Kember in his late twenties and the pain when the relationship ended. Of the struggle of finding himself single, penniless and paralysed at 40 and his attempts to numb his pain through drink, and the spiritual journey he went on as he recognised and followed the call to life in all its fullness as God searched him out: "Where are you?" Last week he was elected unanimously as the Mayor of Truro. Kember will be his mayoress. His vision is of a community where there is care and respect for all of creation.

The story of Adam and Eve then is everyone's story. A story of a good and beautiful world which has gone awry. Of separation and the search for restoration. Of losing innocence and finding wisdom. And of God's search to restore creation to original goodness and oneness in which we're wise stewards of all that we've been given as we listen and respond to the call to return home: "Where are you?"

This week is World Environment Day. And the focus this decade is on Ecosystem Restoration. The event was due to be launched last year but was postponed because of the pandemic. But perhaps the pandemic's given us a renewed respect for creation. And of how interconnected we all are. The action of each and every person can and does make a difference.

I'm privileged to accompany and learn from a Pioneer Ordinand, Sam Wernham. She runs River Dart Wild Church. You might have heard of it? And combines her love of the Creator, with her love of creation and her commitment to community partnership and social action. Over the years, she's worked tirelessly to bring about systemic change, exploring ways to increase our connection with nature, to repair and restore our ecosystems, to re-wild and raise awareness of our local rivers and waterways. We're currently following the River Dart in her monthly pilgrimages. But there are so many ways we can care for God's creation and restore our connection to it: Forest schools, ecochurch, the greening of community spaces, gardening, living churchyard projects, tree planting or supporting #Wave of Hope. We can't go back but we can go forwards together and each take responsibility to make our world a better place.....yes Paradise can be restored, one day, one step, one action at a time: "Where are you?"