

Today we start a new set of readings leading through Lent up to Easter. So the Old Testament is starting at the beginning! with paradise in the Garden of Eden. And the New Testament contains two stories the stilling of the storm and setting free the man called "Legion".

In each of the three stories we have a revelation of God's glory - we have God coming close to people - and the people involved learning something new about God.

In Genesis, - the Creation story from the perspective of relationships with God - we see God making the man and the woman and placing them in the garden where all is well.

God makes two creatures because
"it is not good for man to be alone"

Here is a picture of how things ought to be man in relationship -

- ◆ in relationship with creation
- ◆ in relationship with a fellow human being
- ◆ and in relationship with God

and each of these relationships is good. How things ought to be.

Paradise - the Garden of Eden
Stilling the storm - and "Legion"

**Second Sunday
before Lent**

**Genesis 2. 4^b - 25
Luke 8. 22 - 35**

Man's "job" - his purpose for existence -
is to look after the rest of creation
and to be a companion, a friend, for God.

As well as the "rightness" of it all
there is also the innocence

*The man and his wife were both naked
and they felt no shame.*

God has set his boundaries
and as long as they/we keep within those limits
all is well.

There is the hint, however,
as the Lord God tells the man the limits,
that there is opportunity for things to go wrong.

*You must not eat from the tree of the
knowledge of good and evil,
for when you eat of it you will surely die.*

We now "fast-forward" to Luke 8
where we see the fruits of that disobedience.

In Eden, all was well,
including of course the weather
On the Lake, there is a storm
which is life-threatening.

Because of human disobedience
the whole of creation is fallen -
the storm hints at our race's falling out
with the forces of nature.

And so creation needs to be redeemed - healed.

Jesus takes command -
and displays his Lordship over the forces of nature
but his disciples do not understand.

"Who is this?" they ask one another.

Once again man is walking with God
with the incarnate God in Jesus,
but he does not know.

This is not innocence, but ignorance,
his senses are dulled, he does not see the truth,
because of his sinfulness.

Jesus tries to reveal the truth
to draw his "friends" to his divinity
but they are not able, not ready.

We see further revelation in the last story
as Jesus encounters the demon-possessed man.
Here again are classic signs

of relationship gone wrong.

This unfortunate man did not wear clothes,
nor live in a house.

What a contrast with Adam and Eve
who did not wear clothes or live in a house.
Here his nakedness was shameful and fearful.
People kept away.

His homelessness was evidence
that he did not belong to a family,
although he had one.

His unfortunate condition
cut him off from those who loved him.

He was unloved.

And then another contrast, another opposite.
He knew exactly who Jesus was!

*What do you want with me, Jesus,
Son of the Most High God?*

He knew who Jesus was, and was afraid of him.

And then the deliverance, curiously,
shows a hint of Jesus' work on the cross.
Jesus drives out the legion of evil spirits
sends them into the herd of unclean animals
and drives them to their death
and so the man is free.

The legion of devils could represent
all the ills of human fallenness.
We are set free by these ills being placed on another,
and then the death of the other (in this case the pigs)
deals with those ills once and for all.

The possessed man now sits at Jesus' feet
in his right mind.
Those around are afraid, and seek to drive Jesus away!
Here is separation, alienation, by choice.
Jesus has dealt with evil
but people still have the free-will to reject Jesus
because he is too much for them
and they fear him.

So the kingdom of God
comes to one man for a while
but not to that region.
And Jesus moves on.

So much we can read into these stories
So many details that teach great truths.

But just to pick out one thread.
to do with our relationship with God.

Designed to be friends
and yet that is spoilt by our choice.
So we know sin, and shame, and evil.
The Enemy has spoilt what God made to be good.

He has spoilt us - our understanding and attitudes;
he has spoilt our bodies, in sickness and alienation;
he has spoilt our environment in creation.

And yet God comes to correct all that.
God who is Lord of all -
the Lord God who would still walk with us
and would be known by us, if we would so choose.

A few demons he can deal with at a stroke,
but our human sinfulness has a greater cost,
his own alienation and death on our behalf.

Here in these few stories
is laid out the whole process of sin and redemption.
And the role of Jesus,
in taking away our death, through his death.

He is to become the stranger, the outcast, unclean,
the herd of pigs plunging to their deaths.

We need to practice telling and hearing this story
(not any one bible story - but the big story
of sin and redemption and Jesus)
because unless we have this big story
fixed in our understanding
we cannot explain the gospel.
And we lose sight also of the glory of God
portrayed in this "Big Picture"

I meet clergy, so does Frances,
for whom this "big picture" is not their world-view
within which everything else falls into place.
And so they do not see redemption history at all;
they lose their grasp on the gospel;
and the whole gospel thing
becomes a watered-down children's story
of everything coming right in the end.
And the cross is robbed
of its power and significance.

It's all so clear to me -
why cannot the world see it also?

So we have to know it - and we have to tell it.

I have this sad feeling
that if the church had got its story right
the world would already be convinced
the world would already be converted
the world would already be saved.
But we haven't, yet, and it isn't, yet.

So we press on.

Be reminded tonight of this great true story
the story of Redemption throughout the ages
which starts with Creation, and the Fall,
and goes through to Jesus and the Church.

It's not just for Sundays.

See it in the world around you.

See it in the world of your papers and magazines
your TV and the video and the cinema.

The things that depict our world
and that make it what it is.

Whether you watch Coronation Street,
or Star Trek, or listen to "The Archers" -
look for signs of human fallenness
and the opportunities for redemption.

When we see our world in a godly perspective
then we will begin to see the opportunities
in our day-to-day world -
opportunities for spreading the gospel.

Then we will begin to reclaim this lost world for Jesus
bit by bit, step by step, prayer by prayer.

Don't ever lose sight of that task.

It is what we are about.

It really is all that life is about.

Everything else is illusion and emptiness.

Keep God in your picture.

Let His mission, be your world-view.

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