

# Studies in Genesis

בראשית ברא אלהים את שמיים ואת הארץ

Bible Notes  
January-March 2014

50p

January 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the Beginning God.*

That's a good thought to start the New Year. In the beginning God. Everything else follows from that thought. God is the ground of our being. *For in him we live, and move, and have our being...For we are also his offspring* (Acts 17<sup>28</sup>). As we review where we have got to in life, as we consider what life might have in store for us, as we think about our families and friends and what this new year might have in store for them, remember, In the beginning God.

January 2<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the Beginning God.*

There are two ways of looking at things. Everything we know is the result of what has gone before. Everything is caused by something. Either you can just keep going back in this chain of causation so that you never get to a beginning or else there is a first cause on which everything else depends. That first cause would be God. Everything depends on God. God makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. So we know what God is like. God is love. Given that love is the first cause of everything that there is, love is the reason for everything, everything we can think about has a Christian perspective. Given that we were created in love, we have infinite hope. Given that all people were created in love, they are there to be loved. Given that plants and animals and the material world were created in love, everything – absolutely everything – is to be received thankfully and to be treated with respect.

January 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the Beginning God.*

But not only in the beginning of time. Time is one of those things which God creates. God is eternal. Time and space exist within the eternity of God. So whether the universe began in the first instant of time, in a Big Bang, as most scientists now believe, or whether it exists continuously in a steady state, as a minority maintain, or whether there were events “before” the Big Bang, the universe still depends on God for its existence – its creation and preservation and above all in its redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ.

January 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

Religion and Science are often portrayed as opposites and the creation stories are represented as a particular point of conflict. Science proceeds by observation of the real world and by reason. Faith is the ability to believe for emotional reasons what might be comforting but which conflicts with common sense.

As a matter of fact, religion and science are on the same side. They are both in pursuit of truth and, if you are to pursue truth, you have to believe that there is such a thing as truth to pursue. You might think it obvious that there is such a thing as truth, but an awful lot of people talk and act as if there were not. Everything is relative, people will tell you. Individuals talk about what is true for me. Cultural relativism, post-modernism, extreme individualism all conspire to deny that there is any such thing as absolute truth. “It depends how you look at it.” “My opinion is as good as yours.” “There is no absolute truth.” If there were no absolute truth, both science and religion would be utterly lost and mathematics would be no more than a convention, a game even.

That is not to say that either science or religion has grasped absolute truth. What scientists and people of faith are doing is seeking the truth, hopefully moving towards the truth in a series of ever less inaccurate approximations, but so far, in reality, what both the theologians and the scientists have discovered, is that the more we know, the more we realise there is yet to know.

January 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1v1

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

It has been observed that science has developed in cultures where people believe that there is one God. The idea that the universe runs in accordance with the laws of God goes back to biblical times. God has made the universe by wisdom. He is reasonable. Therefore His creation is reasonable. Reality is rational. Reality is susceptible of explanation. It is because we believe that there are patterns to discover that we become scientists. There is truth out there. Otherwise it wouldn't be worth looking for it.

January 6<sup>th</sup> (Epiphany)

Genesis 1 v1

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The wise men looked to the heavens and saw the star. They interpreted it as a sign of God. They followed the star and it led them to Jesus. Did it lead them to faith? We don't know, but we may hope so from the fact that they came so far and offered gifts. The wonders of creation point us to God. The more we know about this marvellous universe, the more we marvel at the God Who made it. The fact that many scientists don't recognise that is very sad. Perhaps we should pray that their eyes might be opened to the truth underlying the wonderful truths they have discovered. God is rational and God is faithful. Insofar as we are like Him (made in His image) we may know Him both by reason and by faith.

January 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

And finally on this verse and the question of Science and Religion, reason and faith are not opposite ways of looking at things. Neither are they alternatives. I don't think it's enough even to say that faith and reason are complementary. You really can't have one without the other. It would take forever to explain why but irrational faith very quickly degenerates into fantasy and reason without the support of faith degenerates into post-modernism. You can't prove by reason alone that there is a rational universe! You need both faith and reason if you are to be a scientist or a theologian. You need both faith and reason in order to live an ordinary, normal human life.

January 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v2

*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

Imagining what it was like at the moment of creation. Classical Christian thought talks about *creatio ex nihilo* – creation out of nothing. God is the only “thing” which (or Who) exists of itself (Himself). Without God there is nothing. So God must therefore have created everything from nothing. This must be true, but it is unimaginable. The Bible rather pictures God bringing order out of chaos. This also must be true and is slightly easier to understand.

Theoretical physicists sometimes seems to speak of the Big Bang as though it were everything springing into existence from nothing. There was nothing. Then there was energy/matter/time/space in an incredibly small space in an incredibly small fraction of time. Energy/matter/time/space then expanded and became the universe as we know it. Other theoretical physicists speak of the conditions which went before the Big Bang and possibly caused it. There are interesting parallels here between what the theologians and the scientists think about these things (not least that I don’t understand either of them). However, we don’t have to tie our understanding of God the Creator to any scientific understanding of how the universe came into being. Whatever conclusions scientists may draw about the world which they are studying that world exists because God made it and God is beyond investigation by the methods of science. Whatever scientists may discover about how energy/matter/space/time organise themselves, ultimately their existence (and their potential to organise) depends on God Who is “outside” energy/matter/space/time and therefore beyond scientific investigation.

January 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v2

*And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

What we’ve been thinking about is incredibly difficult to understand – probably beyond our understanding at least until we get to Heaven. So let’s take an awe break. Let’s just think how marvellous all this and wonder at the greatness of the Creator of it all. *The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* He is intimate with the universe He originates.

January 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v2

*And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

God eternally is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus didn’t come into existence when He was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Ghost didn’t come into existence that Pentecost when there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind and flames of fire dividing onto the heads of the apostles. It is God’s eternal nature to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bearing this in mind helps to save us from “domesticating” Jesus as a good man and a wise teacher and the Holy Spirit as the source of our religious experiences. Jesus certainly is a good man and a wise teacher and the Holy Spirit certainly is God in us, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit are no less God than the Father is God.

January 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v3

*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*

Creation is accomplished by the Word of God. God only has to say for it to happen. The Word of God is powerful. The Word of God uttered by the prophets both warns and blesses. It interprets the signs of the times. But it also tears down and builds up kingdoms. The Word of God sustains and controls the natural world (e.g. Psalm 29). The Word of God accomplishes God’s purposes. The Word of God is written in the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God is Jesus.

January 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v4

Everything which God makes is good. It isn’t hard to think of the blessings of light, especially if we couple them with the blessings of warmth. Bringing order out of chaos, organising the cosmos, God separates the light from the darkness. Jesus is the Light of the world, the Word of God. Christian people (dwelling in Christ and He dwelling in us) are also called to be the light of the world and to proclaim the Word of God.

January 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v5

God names night and day because He is Lord. He is Lord of time and eternity. He gives things their names and blesses them with His holy Name. The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

January 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 6-8

If you want to picture in your mind what is going on in the creation story, you can imagine the firmament as the sky. The waters below the firmament are the seas, lakes and rivers; the waters above are presumably the clouds. The sky appears as a barrier between heaven and earth and we can imagine God and His angels living on the other side of it. It thunders when God rearranges His furniture! Only we know it isn't like that. The sky isn't a barrier. All that happens is that the atmosphere gets thinner and thinner until it really isn't there anymore. Birds and aeroplanes fly in the sky. Rockets go beyond the sky and into space. They don't wind up in God's front room! Maybe God is beyond space, beyond the universe. But scientists tell us that the universe is infinite. They also tell us that it is expanding. I don't know how an infinite universe can expand or what it might expand into. And they say religion is hard to understand!

The point is that we should not think of heaven as some place a very long way away or eternity as an extremely long time. Heaven, the dwelling-place of God, eternity, is beyond time and space. It is true to say that God isn't anywhere but it is also true to say that He is everywhere. He cannot be contained or confined in time and space but He fills time and space. The firmament isn't simply the sky; it is the boundary between the material realm and the realm of the spirit, but that boundary is not located in time and space. Neither is it impenetrable. Time and space exist within God yet they are not God. God creates the Creation and separates it from Himself. Creation and Creator are distinct. Pantheists believe that everything is God. Panentheists believe that everything is God and that then God is infinitely more. But Christians believe that the creation is distinct from the Creator whilst intimately connected by bonds of love. The best analogy I can think of is marriage. Husband and wife are two people but one flesh in a lifelong bond of love. So God and creation are distinct entities united by love so long as time endures. On reflection I must mean so long as eternity endures because we shall live eternally in the love of God, not spirits dissolved into His Spirit like drops of water in the ocean of God's love, but resurrected bodies, our individual selves, lost in eternal contemplation of the Beatific Vision.

January 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 9&10

Order out of chaos, organising the cosmos. God separates land from sea. Creation myths of the Middle East tend to feature the god's or gods' victory over the power of the sea. The ocean is evidently powerful. Storms sink ships. The waves crash on the shore. The surface of the sea is never still. The surface of the sea is a barrier. You can smash into it if you fall from the cliffs, but it doesn't sustain your weight when you step into it. The surface reflects the light, but you can see through it, but what you can see through water looks distorted and may appear broken where it passes through the surface. The sea is mighty and mysterious and, in the ancient myths, it takes a god to put the sea in its place. We know that the sea is the creation of God, not a rival power which He has to defeat. But this theme of more mighty and mysterious than the sea lies behind the stories of the Flood and the crossings of the Red Sea and the River Jordan. It is reflected in some of the psalms and it is the background to the stories of Jesus walking on the water and calming the storm. These Old Testament stories provide the context in which we can understand Who Jesus must be if He walks on water and calms storms. Jesus is God, one with the Creator of Heaven and earth.

January 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 11-13

Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings,  
He made their glowing colours, He made their tiny  
wings.

I love that hymn. I often think about it when I look at my garden or take Max for a walk in the countryside. Every single thing is made by God and exists in His love. Jesus says: *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father?* The danger of the scientific approach is that it can seem to distance God from His Creation. It is easy to picture God as the maker of a wonderful mechanism (the Universe). He sets it going like a clock and off it goes in accordance with the laws of physics and chemistry, the spring gradually running down as the cogs turn, kept in time by the pendulum. It wouldn't matter if the clockmaker absented himself entirely. The mechanism would still run. Thinking of God and the universe like this is called Deism. For Deists God makes no difference in our day to day lives. Let me come back to this tomorrow.

January 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 11-13

Farmers sometimes complain that people nowadays just don't realise where their food comes from. Most of us buy our food from the supermarket where we find it wrapped up and at least partially prepared for eating. We don't think of the challenges of growing the crops – the weather, the fertility of the soil, pests and diseases – nor of the challenge of getting it to market in good condition. We make no allowance for the cost in labour. Neither do we consider the environmental degradation which might be associated with over-intensive farming or transporting goods unnecessarily over long distances. We forget that our shrink-wrapped meat was once a living, breathing animal which had to be cared for humanely. All we really know about food is that we want what we like when we want it at a price we can afford. Most of us have become detached from the process of food production and we no longer appreciate those who provide us with what we eat. The amount of food thrown away is surely a testimony to the fact that we do not value food highly enough.

In the same way we may lose our sense that God is the Provider of everything that we receive. We may think of Him as the One Who created the Universe and set it running billions of years ago. But do we think of Him as intimately involved in the creation of this particular dish which we are tucking into now? Do we consciously feel that it is appropriate to say grace? Let me come back to this tomorrow.

January 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 11-13

A long time ago Bishop Berkeley pointed out that we cannot know that anything exists unless we are observing it. Does a tree make a sound if it falls in a forest where there is no-one to hear it? This illustrates the limitations of science on its own. We can't observe everything. Reason on its own ultimately fails to prove anything about the real world. In fact reason alone has a hard job establishing that there is a real world. If things only exist or may only exist so long as they are observed by a conscious mind, what holds the cosmos together when there is no one observing it? Berkeley's answer is that of course things cohere in the Mind of God. Can I ask you to let me have one more day on this tomorrow?

January 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 11-13

Around the beginning of the last century, scientists developed the Theory of Relativity. Before that, it had been rather assumed that the universe exists as it is and that it was possible (at least in theory) for human beings to observe it objectively and without changing it. Relativity teaches us that much depends on the observer. Coming at it from a wholly different angle, scientists came to a similar position to that of Bishop Berkeley. Reality is not something "out there" to be observed by an impartial observer outside the system. Reality actually depends on the observer.

What this means to me is that we don't have to be deists. We don't have to think of God as a clever mechanic who made the cosmos, set it running and is no longer involved in it (except occasionally perhaps to intervene to put things right when it breaks down and to be there at the end of time when the universe has finished whatever it was constructed to do). God is the eternal Observer relative to Whom what we think of reality exists. Or to put it more simply:

Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings,  
He made their glowing colours, He made their tiny wings.

January 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

If this were meant to be a scientific or historical account of how God made the universe, wouldn't it have put the creation of the sun before the creation of light? After all pretty much all the light we experience comes from the sun. The moon reflects the sun's light. Artificial light sources (candles, electricity, etc.) draw on the sun's energy stored in oil or coal or whatever. Maybe not. We now know that light existed long before our sun or any other star. Though you might ask what was light when there was no one to see it? What was light when there were no suns or stars to be light sources and no other surfaces to absorb, reflect, observe or record it? It blows the mind. Nevertheless I don't think Genesis 1 is about physics or chemistry or history. The Bible is not tremendously interested in how God created the heavens and the earth. Rather the point is that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The point is why did He do so insofar as we can understand His loving purposes? The point is how ought we to respond to what has done/is doing/will do.

January 21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

The sun and the moon and the stars are very impressive. They are awe-inspiring. Many cultures worship them as gods. Cynics say that the Roman Emperor Constantine selected Sunday as the Sabbath (instead of Saturday) as much because he was a sun worshipper as because it was the day of the week on which Jesus, the Son of God, rose from the dead. Astrology is a hangover from the superstitious notion that the stars and planets have some mystical significance.

Biblical faith sets us free from all that. We don't worship lumps of rock in distant space. Just as well. You become what you worship just as you are what you eat. We worship the living God and thus we are *transformed by the renewing of our mind* (Romans 12<sup>2</sup>), *changed into the same image from glory to glory* (II Corinthians 3<sup>18</sup>). Neither are we superstitious. Our destinies are not determined by our stars. Our lives are in the hands of the living God. Biblical faith also sets us free to be scientists. If you believe that things like the sun and stars and planets and trees and rocks and springs are divine, you may well feel that it is impious to study them. It seems blasphemous to investigate them. You can't analyse what you worship. It is at least in part the recognition that the entire material universe is created by God and that He has given it to us which set us free to become scientists and study this wonderful universe as a tribute to its infinitely more wonderful Creator.

All the whole heavens are the Lord's: the earth has he given to the children of men (Psalm 115<sup>16</sup>).

January 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

We probably primarily think of the sun and moon as lights, but before it gets on to that, Genesis points out their usefulness in marking time – day and night, the months of the year, the year itself. Time itself is relative. Galileo established that a pendulum keeps time by timing the swaying of a lamp in church against his pulse. Now we time our pulse against a watch or clock. There are discussions about relating atomic time to time as measured by the sun (the need or not for leap seconds). There is no absolute time. You can never say that it is 12.00 throughout the universe. Time and rhythm are very important in our lives but they have to be measured against something.

January 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

After the Flood, God promises Noah, *While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease* (Genesis 8<sup>22</sup>). The rainbow is a token of this promise – this covenant between God and the created order. As we have said, with food from the supermarket, electric light and central heating, we may be much less conscious than our ancestors of the importance of these natural rhythms, but we still depend on them. We are brought up sharp when snow blocks the roads and the supermarket shelves are empty or, in a power cut, we have to go to bed because our homes are suddenly cold and dark. One of God's greatest gifts to us is the dependability of nature. The universe does obey the laws scientists discover though science has no explanation as to why that is so or whether it is always so. We depend on this pattern – the world works as we expect it to. The sun will rise tomorrow even if it is behind the clouds. This is one reason perhaps why we should not pray for too many miracles if by miracles we mean disruptions in God's natural order.

January 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

There is another point to these times and seasons. There were morning and evening sacrifices. On the seventh day of each week was the Sabbath. The month began with the new moon festival. Over the course of the year there were three pilgrim feasts – Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles – and an annual Day of Atonement. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year when the land itself rested, lying fallow, and there was release from certain burdensome obligations. The 50<sup>th</sup> year was the jubilee when debts were cancelled. Meshed with the natural rhythm of night and day, seedtime and harvest, was the sacred rhythm which enacted what God had done and was doing for His people; which provided an opportunity for rest, recreation and worship; which relegated business and servile work to where they belong, below family, friendship and faith; which reminded people of their obligations to God and to one another and to the non-human creation. Observing this sacred rhythm thus consecrated the whole of time. It is worth asking whether we have time for eternity? Daily prayer and bible reading; a Sabbath for rest and worship; Christmas and Easter as religious festivals, rather than orgies of consumption; feasts of obligation when we feel bound to mark our Lord's Epiphany or Ascension? Or are we too busy?

January 25<sup>th</sup> (Conversion of St Paul):

Genesis 1 vv 20-23

O God, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is a wonderful world. If you study Botany or Zoology, it is absolutely amazing how many life forms there are. Other civilisations have worshipped plants and animals as gods. You might think that some animal rights activists elevate animal rights to a level above human rights – especially when they threaten to kill people who experiment on animals. Many scientists, however, regard all these living creatures as nothing more than the result of millions of years of evolution, of chance mutations surviving or not surviving according to the principle of the survival of the fittest. In Romans 1 St Paul argues that it is humanity's failure to recognise these creatures as the creation of God that has caused us to worship what is created instead of Him Who created everything and have therefore become moral reprobates. We become what we worship. Human beings need to be converted, to hear the Word of God, to repent and believe the Gospel, to be baptised into Christ's Death in order that we may participate in His Resurrection.

January 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 20-23

We don't worship these creatures, but we do respect them as the Creation of God. The animal rights activists are correct that we ought not to cause suffering to other living creatures. We do get to eat meat and wear leather and use animals in experiments to advance our knowledge, but we have a responsibility to the animals in our care. We are obliged to treat them humanely and personally I think that we should take their lives sparingly. We shouldn't waste meat, which was once a living creature. I don't really believe in hunting just for fun – though for food or pest control it's different. I wouldn't choose to use animal products in fashionable clothing or cosmetics if there were alternatives unless, for example, the skins are by products of an essential industry. You have make your own decisions about how far it is legitimate to use or exploit living creatures.

January 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 24&25

Some animal rights activists object to our having farm animals or keeping animals in zoos or owning pets. They believe that animals ought always to live in their natural state. Other people might argue that, although of course animals in zoos must be kept in humane conditions, zoos provide an opportunity to study animals and to breed rare species which, in the end, might be in the animals' interests as much as ours. Animals in zoos or on farms or kept as pets are generally better fed and safer from predators than wild animals and they get veterinary treatment when they are sick. Animals which have been highly bred as farm animals or as pets would not survive in the wild. Some people have thought that the eventual destiny of animals is not to be wild at all but to be cared for by human beings. In developed and crowded countries like ours there is little or no land which is not in some sense managed (or mismanaged) by human beings. So you could argue that there are no truly wild animals living in purely natural conditions in much of the world. People are sometimes quite dogmatic about these issues but they really ought to look at all the facts before pontificating.

January 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 24&25

If we leave God out of it and explain everything in terms of evolution there are two contradictory conclusions we can come to with regard to animals. On the one hand, we might decide that there is nothing special about human beings. We are just one of many millions of species that have evolved. We are therefore no more important than any other animal and we have no right to exploit other species by hunting or farming them, perhaps to extinction. In fact if we and the rest of animalkind are nothing more than the product of blind chance and the natural selection for survival of the fittest, we might question where an abstraction like rights comes from. Surely abstracts are merely constructs of our concrete brains! (Science without faith is self-defeating!) Scientists who associate rights with consciousness are obliged to assign more rights to adult chimpanzees than to human babies! (See what I mean!)

But then again we might decide that we have every right to exploit and if necessary to exterminate every less fit species which stands in the way of our survival and flourishing. You see how you have to bring religion into it if you want to act with common sense?

January 29<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

The Christian faith teaches that human beings are distinct from the animals. Yes we have bodies pretty much like animal bodies, but we are made in the image and likeness of God. What does that mean? Some classical Christian thinkers have suggested that God's image and likeness are two different things, the one corrupted by the Fall, the other not. I don't think this a helpful way to look at this verse. Image and likeness, I believe, are two different words for the same thing, combined together like this for poetic emphasis. In what sense are we made in the image of God? Given the context, some people have suggested that we are like God because we are creative. Some people have suggested that it is because we are intrinsically immortal (before the Fall). Others have suggested that it is because we have enormous potential to do tremendous things. The reason we are not to eat of the tree of knowledge is lest we should become like gods or as God – either translation is possible (Genesis 3<sup>5</sup>). It is the serpent who makes this claim to Eve, taking the truth and distorting it as the devil so often does. I am never surprised when human beings learn to do something that previous generations thought only God could do (obliterate the world with nuclear weapons, travel in space, perform heart transplants, fertilise a baby in a test tube, genetically engineer crops, for example). The Book of Genesis informs us that it is our nature to perform these godlike actions. The question is whether we do so responsibly. Christ is described as the image of God (Colossians 1<sup>15</sup>). We are made to be like Him. Those of you who hear me preach will know that my favourite theme is that God is love and that we are created in His image to be people who fulfil God's commandments because they are all summed up in the command to love.

January 30<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*Let us make man in our own image.*

Why the plural? When speaking formally the Queen says "we" where you or I would say "I". It is called the royal we. On formal documents, bishops write "we", just meaning themselves alone. The so called intensive plural stresses the importance of the speaker. In some languages there are singular and plural words for "you" like tu and vous in French. You use the singular form informally to your friends and the plural more formally. The same was once true in English with thou for the singular and you for the plural. Interestingly God was always the more intimate singular Thou. I-Thou.

January 31<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*Let us make man in our own image.*

Probably originally the plural here is an intensive plural. The Hebrew word for God is plural as a way of showing how important God is. God is God to the uttermost. He incorporates in His singular self everything that is divine.

The word is elohim (אֱלֹהִים). Because it is a plural word it can mean gods as well as God – which is why Genesis 3<sup>5</sup> might mean *like the gods* and might mean *like God*.

Christian thinkers, however, have understood these plurals to mean that at the creation God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is eternally plural, if you like, just as He is eternally one.

This is important because the Christian faith absolutely depends on the fact that Jesus is absolutely God – not merely a part of God or an aspect of God, but completely God. Given that God is essentially eternal, Jesus is essentially eternal. He does not come into existence when He is conceived by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. He is not the first and greatest being which God created. He is God and our salvation depends on that fact.

He is also wholly and completely human born in time. That too is vital to our salvation. He can only effect our atonement with God because He is both fully human and fully God. Whether or not Genesis hints at this, this doctrine is fundamental to the our New Testament faith. If Jesus were just a good man, only a wise teacher, simply a miracle worker, merely a martyr, the Christian faith would be founded on a lie. It wouldn't matter which religion we belonged to because all religions have their good people, wise teachers, miracle workers and martyrs. What is distinctive about Christianity, what is vital, the key doctrine that we are obligated to proclaim to the whole world is that *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3<sup>16</sup>).

I've laboured this, but I do think that the big threat to the Christian Church in this country is that people are so casual about Jesus. We couldn't be casual about Him if we truly understood Who He is.



February 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*Let them have dominion.*

This verse is anathema to some people in the green movement. The idea that human beings have dominion over nature is sometimes abused to suggest that we have the right to do what we like with the world – selfishly to use up its resources, to pollute it, to destroy whatever gets in our way, and inevitably to permit the rich and powerful to grasp the best of everything while allowing the poor to go hungry. Stewardship is perhaps a better word than dominion, though some green activists don't like that either. They don't like the idea that we are in any sense separate from nature, but we've dealt with that above. Human beings are privileged above the rest of the created order. We are made in the image of God. We do have dominion over nature. Look what we have done for good and ill subduing the forces of nature under us. Dominion is real whether the greens like it or not. The point is that in Christian thinking power is always associated with responsibility. It is God's world. When He entrusts us with dominion over that world, we are answerable to Him for what we do with it.

February 2<sup>nd</sup> (Candlemas)

Genesis 1 v26

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Obviously stewardship means sharing out the good things of the world so that everyone has enough. It means avoiding cruelty to animals. It means being sensible in exploiting non-renewable resources such as gas and oil. It means dealing with waste prudently. My own personal inclination would be to go much further. I would want to preserve endangered species. I wouldn't want to bulldoze a beautiful landscape. I'd hesitate to allow noise pollution from industrial processes or traffic to disrupt our tranquillity. I'd turn out the street lights so that we could see the stars. And we'd all be much less prosperous and much less comfortable! Striking a balance as responsible stewards! Needs prayer and thought, doesn't it? Jesus was presented in the Temple on this 40<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. Mary was purified. We bring our perplexities and present them to God in Him. We seek purity for ourselves and for our world, which we can only find in Him.

February 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 3 v27

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

God created earthworms with both male and female organs. Worms are hermaphrodites. They are not male and female. They are all the same. So why did God create some humans to be male and some to be female? Of course that isn't a relevant question if you believe that it was all a matter of chance and the survival of the fittest. If that were the case, there would be no ultimate purposes. We would be male and female because our animal ancestors chanced to be that way and survived better than creatures with any alternative arrangements. Worms would be hermaphrodite simply because it suited their line of development and hermaphrodite worm ancestors happened to be the ones that were fittest to survive.

There seem to be two different cases for feminism and to me they are not wholly compatible. Classical feminism says that men and women are essentially the same apart from the plumbing. If we treated boys and girls in the same way, we are told, they would grow up the same. If that is the case, fairness requires that boys and girls, men and women are given the same opportunities. There must be no discrimination on the grounds of gender. The other case for feminism is that women bring something different to a workplace or a social situation from what men bring. It has been suggested, for example, that the disastrous collapse of Lehman Brothers would not have happened if some of them had been sisters. Women might have been more cautious and restrained the men from taking reckless risks. This version of feminism recognises and celebrates the differences between men and women and pushes the equality agenda. This second kind of feminist wants half of MPs to be women not only because it is fair to girls to have the same chance as boys to succeed in politics, but also because they believe that Parliament would be more effective if there were more equal numbers of men and women. It begs some questions, however. Why, for example, would gender characteristics which evolved in preindustrial societies necessarily work out to make 50/50 the right ratio in a boardroom or a legislative chamber? If men and women are different, maybe in some jobs the ratio should be 60/40 or 70/30. Might some jobs not be best done by 100% men or 100% women if men and women are really different? And what would classical feminism say to that?

February 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v27

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

One more question from yesterday, if men and women are really the same apart from the plumbing or if they are complementary such that every job requires a mixture of men and women in approximately equal proportions, how come we have only just realised that? Science and reason alone can't answer these questions. What does the Bible say? As this verse makes clear, the Bible affirms that men and women are equally in the image of God. You can't get much higher than that. You're only a little lower than the angels whoever you are reading this, man or woman. We are also all one in Christ (Galatians 3<sup>28</sup>). Men and women get to heaven on the same terms. *For by grace are ye saved through faith* (Ephesians 2<sup>8</sup>). There are remarkable women in the Bible story, women who are big achievers in God's cause. And yet the Bible makes a distinction between men and women. In the Bible men and women are equal but not the same. They have overlapping but not identical rolls. Plenty of people would argue that changes since biblical times such as contraception and mechanisation have now made it possible for women to take on rolls that were only available to men in the past and that absolute equality of opportunity ought now to be offered in fulfilment of what is implicit in Genesis and in Galatians – that women and men are essentially the same. But do you really think that the only differences between men and women are anatomical? If not, might not men and women have different rolls in society even today?

February 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v28

I remember meeting a young Jewish man who said he couldn't understand why Christians valued celibacy so highly. He pointed out that God's first commandment was *Be fruitful and multiply*. God has given the human race wives and husbands. Family life is a great blessing. Children are a gift from God. We are made for each other. *Honour thy father and thy mother* is the first commandment with a promise. We should celebrate family life. I was going to suggest that the end of today's meditation might be to thank God for your family and to pray for them, but I am sure you do that every day anyway. Some people may indeed be called to be celibate and some are alone against their wishes just as some people have a miserable family life, but none of that denies the fundamental truth, *Be fruitful and multiply*.

February 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v29

And now I'm going to be a little bit contentious. For most of human history, the danger has been the risk of being wiped out as a tribe, by famine, disease or war. Moreover people depended on their grown up children to look after them in old age. So people were bound to have lots of children. The average age of communities was low with lots of children and young people about. Life might be hard but it was to the family that people looked for companionship and laughter, education and healthcare, food, clothing and shelter. Nowadays we think that the threat is not so much of being wiped out because there are too few of us but that we shall use up all the world's resources because of terrifying population growth. Put bluntly, if fewer children die because of better nutrition and healthcare, there will be just too many people in the world to feed. That's the pessimistic view. The optimistic view is that the world's human population worldwide will soon cease to grow as it has in Europe and America. When people become wealthier and they know that their children are likely to survive infancy, they start to have fewer children. They can be confident that their children will live. Women choose paid employment over motherhood and families would rather be small in number and reasonably comfortably off than larger in number but living in poverty. The average age of such communities is high. There are lots of old people about and we look to the state to look after us – providing nursery care and schools, health care and unemployment benefits, and care in our old age. Where I'm risking being contentious is in pointing out that a warm bedroom with the latest computer might not really be a substitute for a brother or sister and the impersonal care the state provides is not the same thing as the love of a parent or daughter looking after us. There are swings and roundabouts in social change.

February 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 29-31

Everything depends on plant growth. Green plants absorb the light of the sun and store it by turning water and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as sugar and starch. By grazing on these plants or by eating other creatures which have grazed on plants we obtain the nutrients and energy we need to sustain mortal life. All these things are the gift of God to us and to be received thankfully and shared generously.

February 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 1-3

Is it even worth trying to justify the Sabbath? No one is going to take any notice. Even Christians don't pay the Sabbath too much attention. For everyone else it is just an ordinary day. Modern society is 24/7. Some industrial processes are uneconomic unless they run continuously. People expect to be able to travel and to buy the things they need at any time. We wouldn't like it if gas, water and electricity were switched off at the weekends. Therefore all sorts of people have to be prepared to go to work any day of the week. Increasingly doctors and hospitals are required to be open on Sundays – not just for emergencies, but for routine investigations and treatments. Why not schools and government offices? If so many people have to go to work on Sundays and so many people choose to indulge in various leisure pursuits and the shops and the cinemas and the sports facilities and the pubs are all open on Sundays the same as they are on any other day, what is the point of making a fuss about it. If you can't beat them, join them. What have we got to lose?

February 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 1-3

Maybe I should have finished yesterday not by asking what have we got to lose, but what have we lost? Certainly the Church has taken a battering from Sunday trading. But what does that indicate? No one is forced to go shopping on Sundays. People could still come to church if they chose to. Indeed I think that even now if all the people in this country who claim to be Christians refused to shop on Sundays it would not be worth the shopkeepers' while in most places to open up. We've lost that day of peace from traffic. We've lost the notion that family members and friends all have the same days off. We've lost that weekly reminder of sacred time, that there is more to life than being a producer and a consumer of material goods. We've lost the opportunity we had to teach children the Christian faith that we had when as many as 50% of the nation's children went to Sunday School. We've lost one aspect of the rhythm of life. I can't help feeling that for many people life is just a way of passing the time until you die – a date which paradoxically they want to put off for as long as possible. We've got rid of the boring bits of the traditional Sunday and thrown out the baby with the bathwater. We've lost what was of value and filled in the void with more of the same pointless activities which we pursue all the week.

February 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v4

If you are reading the bible in a fairly literal translation (like AV, RSV, NIV) you will notice an abrupt change of style at this point. This is the beginning of a new section, a different perspective on the creation story. Most scholars believe that these two perspectives originally came from different sources. They are, however, both incorporated into Holy Scripture. The Bible as we have it is a whole. The Holy Spirit guided the Holy Church to recognise what we call the canon of Scripture. This is the Bible. It is the Word of God. We are to read all of it and to be guided by all of it – not to pick and choose what we find most congenial.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

February 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 5-6

The creation awaits the creation of humanity. Atheistic evolutionary theory necessarily regards the arrival of human beings as a result of the way natural forces happen to have played out. There is no ultimate significance. The universe just was the way it was at the Big Bang and the impersonal laws of physics and chemistry operated (obviously mindlessly) to produce at least one planet on which life could develop and on that planet life just happened to develop in such a way that eventually human beings would appear. Our consciousness, our art and culture, our ethics, all the things which make human beings different from animals, are by-products of the evolutionary process which depends solely on the variation produced in our offspring by random mutations of our genes and the survival of the fittest. When our bodies die, that is the end of our own personal story. In time human beings will very likely evolve into a new species – unless we so pollute the planet that life becomes impossible to sustain or we destroy it in a nuclear conflagration. So atheism. Deism isn't very different. God sets the universe running but is then uninvolved in what happens next. So nothing means anything beyond what it means to us.

February 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 5-6

I'm labouring these points because I fear that Christians in the C21 are in danger of succumbing to Deism – to believing in a God Who makes no difference to anything. I'm not saying that evolutionary theory is wrong. There is a great deal of conflict (especially in USA) between Christians who deny evolution and scientists who regard the Theory of Evolution as the only credible explanation for life on earth as we know it. But whether or not we evolved is not really a religious question. I don't think either Genesis 1 or Genesis 2 sets out to be a scientific explanation of the universe. In fact they tell the historical or scientific stories in rather different ways. These different accounts are incompatible as history or science but they are both included in Holy Scripture, because Holy Scripture is not ultimately concerned with scientific questions. It doesn't matter to your Christian discipleship whether or not you believe in evolution. That is a scientific question. What does matter, however, to our Christian faith is that we believe that God is intimately involved in the world. He is not an infinitely great engineer outside the system, who designed and built the machine we call the universe, wound it up and left it to run, only intervening (if he intervenes at all) occasionally to work "miracles". I think it is highly probable that we evolved, but I do not believe that we evolved as the result of the blind, impersonal working out of scientific laws or that we evolved by pure, indifferent chance. The observer affects the outcome of the quantum event, even though it may appear to be a matter of chance. The Observer is God. God the Observer more than affects events; He effects them.

Sorry about this, but what I am trying to say is that God is intimately involved in everything that happens. He cares about you and me as individuals. He has known you and me since before time began, in all eternity in fact. Our lives are in His Hands – every detail of them. Coming back to Matthew 10<sup>29-31</sup> *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.* Think of God as your Father Who looks after you and demands the highest standards of you and as the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Deity – not as some remote figure who makes little difference in your daily life.

February 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v7

However the universe was made, it was made for us to live in. *All the whole heavens are the Lords: the earth has he given to the children of men.* (Psalm 115<sup>16</sup>). Sometimes people point out how vast the universe is and how many billions of years it has existed. *All that just for us?* they ask. It is mind-boggling isn't it? Well I don't claim to know why God is so extravagant in making so much. Neither would I presume to claim that humanity was His only purpose in creating everything that there is. But I do not doubt for one moment that the creation of us human beings in His own image is in His eternal plan, the outworking of His Nature which is Love.

February 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v7

We are different from the animals. And we are different from the angels. We are mortal bodies just like the animals are, ultimately made of the dust of the ground. The fact that we are bodies is essential to us. We say in the creed *I believe in the Resurrection of the body.* I don't suppose that our resurrection bodies will be made of the dust of the ground but in some way we are bodily in all eternity. Unlike the animals, we are living souls because God has breathed into us the breath of life. Perhaps we are like the angels in that respect? We are spiritual beings as well as bodily beings. Both are essential to our human nature.

February 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v8

God provides for our needs. He provides for the needs of the human race. He looks after us individually. Wonder. Thankfulness. Stewardship. Surely we must marvel at this incredible world in which we are set. Surely we should be thankful that all our needs are met. Surely we have a responsibility to work in order that we may play our part in the general prosperity. (Work doesn't necessarily mean the sort of things people are paid for. It includes housework and gardening, looking after other people, working in the community, conversation, friendship, etc. and prayer.) Surely we have a duty to share so that everyone has enough. Surely we have a duty to look after this wonderful world, both its physical resources and its natural beauty. Wisdom in our stewardship of creation. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Psalm 111<sup>10</sup>).

February 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v8

The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate,  
GOD made them high or lowly, And order'd their estate.  
This is the verse of *All Things Bright and Beautiful* that we no longer sing. I can see why. It can be taken to justify as God-given a social order in which some people are inevitably rich and some are inevitably poor. The problem is that if God didn't make them high or lowly, who did? And who ordered their estate? Is refusing to sing this verse a step on the road to Deism? We don't want to believe that God made some rich and some poor. So we deny that God is involved in the social order. If you don't believe that you owe your position in life and your possessions to God, you have no reason to thank Him for them. If you don't believe that you owe your position in life and your possessions to God, how do you account for them? Luck? Inheritance? You've got what you've deserved? If any of those three, to whom would you be responsible for what you did with your life? If you depended on luck, your background and your own efforts, what would be the point of prayer? Surely it is when we believe that everything comes from God that we think that there is point to praying for a better life. Surely it is when we are thankful for what we have that we realise our responsibility to use it wisely. The poor man prays for God's blessing on his efforts to do better for himself and for his family. The rich man realises that God has given him the opportunity to do a lot of good in the world. And maybe both of them seek to work with God and together in bringing about social change and a more just society.

February 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v8

My mother went to the funeral of a very dear friend who had finally died from a long and horrible illness. In his address the minister said that people might be wondering why God hadn't answered their prayers for her recovery. His answer was one that has become very popular in recent years. God respects the freedom of the universe. Either He can't intervene or He chooses not to intervene (out of respect for our freedom) in what happens on earth. So we can't blame God for the bad things which happen in the world. Instead we may be comforted by the thought that in Jesus God suffers with us. He shares our pain but He can't take it away. Not much point in prayer then! No that minister wrong. He left my mother feeling very unsatisfied. God does hold our lives in His Hands even though we may not understand why He lets things happen as they do.

February 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v9

So God provides for all our needs. Why did He plant the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil? (It is not quite clear whether these were two trees or one.) Wasn't this putting temptation in Adam's way? One of the things human beings need to flourish, however, is freedom. We have to have meaningful choices if we are to be free and we can't develop as people without freedom.

February 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v9

This is personal, but it has struck me lately as rather odd that a traditional Christian like me who believes in original sin thinks that we have to trust people whereas we live in a world in which most people take the more sentimental view that babies are born innocent but trust no one. Original sin is the doctrine that since the Fall, all human beings (except Jesus) have been born with the taint of sin. *Behold I was shapen in wickedness: and in sin hath my mother conceived me* (Psalm 51<sup>5</sup>). It is not that we are being punished for the sin of our distant ancestor. It is, that in common with Adam, in fact we all do sin. We do not love God wholeheartedly; we do not love our neighbours as ourselves. The remedy is God's free gift of forgiveness through the Cross of Jesus Christ. All we have to do is to repent of our sins and to be baptised. We are then set free to live lives pleasing to God – that is loving lives. Most people nowadays, however, refuse to believe in original sin. A baby is so clearly born innocent. Surely, they think, children only grow up bad if they are corrupted by adults. Presumably they think that those adults were corrupted by bad adults when they were children and that those bad adults had been corrupted by the previous generation – and so on back to Adam? Anyway, despite this sentimental belief in original righteousness, we now live in a society in which nobody is regarded as trustworthy. We keep our homes locked up and even our churches. Every area of life is regulated by central or local government. We are kept under constant surveillance. Children aren't allowed out to play. Because we cannot be trusted every aspect of our lives has to be controlled by those in authority and then we find we can't trust them either! We can't trust people. So we have to control them. But people don't develop their human potential if they are not allowed to be free. Believing in the reality of both sin and redemption, I can afford to trust you with freedom. If I didn't believe in either I couldn't trust you!

February 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 10-14

The Garden of Eden is very beautiful and richly endowed. The description of the four rivers has led some people to locate it in Iraq. During the Iraq war I used to think what a horrible contrast between Eden before the Fall and that land as it is today. It is probably better not to ascribe any geographical location to Eden. It may never have been literally a place and, if it was, there is no way back (Genesis 3<sup>24</sup>). It is right, however, to contrast what life would be lived in harmony with the God of love and what is like when we rebel against Him.

February 21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 2 v15

The creation awaits the creation of humanity. As we've seen, some environmentalists seem to have the notion that somehow things "ought" to be in their "natural state", that the world is somehow spoilt by human activity. Even in their own terms this is odd. Even if they don't believe that human beings are special, they surely have to accept that as a species we inhabit this planet and have as much "right" as any other species to impinge on our environment. I'm using all these inverted commas. The weather forecaster on the radio today said that temperatures were above what they "ought" to be before the time of year. Who (apart from God) can say what temperatures ought to be? The weather is under no moral obligations. What he meant was that the temperatures currently are higher than normal. In the same way, it is hard to see how environmentalists or anyone else can say what the landscape ought to be like. It changes without human interference – floods, volcanoes, high winds, etc. – and human beings change it – forestry, farming, industrialisation, etc.. Many habitats wouldn't exist without human intervention or certainly wouldn't exist in such numbers. Birds of the open country (such as skylarks) depend on farmers to keep the country open. Otherwise it would mostly be woods – useless for larks, plovers and so forth. The implication of the Bible is that we have a key role in the ecosystem. We are meant to be here. We are stewards.

February 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 16&17

Why is knowledge dangerous? I think most of us are in favour of learning. Children are usually eager to learn and actually I do think that this little bit of original righteousness is corrupted by adults who turn learning into a chore. The more we know, the more complete we are as people and the more we are able to be useful in the world. Some people might worry that educating people (especially the lower orders) gives them ideas above their station. I hope no Christian would think like that. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10<sup>34</sup>). It is surely His Will that every person whom He has made should have the opportunity to develop fully his or her potential. I accept that the curriculum must include the basics (say reading, writing and arithmetic to start with) that most of us need to function in the world but it ought never to be constrained. Children should never be discouraged from tackling that book which is "too hard" for them or pursuing areas of inquiry which don't count towards their exams. But there are dangers in knowledge. One is arrogance. We may be tempted to think that we are better people than those who are less well educated than we are. There is also the danger of abuse. We may use our knowledge to do unwise or bad things. I remember a young man who when he was a little boy was very bright but apparently lacking a moral compass. His carer thought he would probably grow up to be a master criminal. Actually he is now a policeman! (Hopefully he acquired a moral compass at some stage!) Finally there is the point that, once you know right from wrong, you have no excuse for going wrong. And, as an appendix, the temptation to do wrong just because you know it is wrong – naughty but nice.

February 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 18-20

If you read Genesis 1 as history, the animals are made before human beings. In Genesis 2 it is the other way round. These stories are not meant to be read as history. So, if you fear that the evidence from science or archaeology conflicts with Genesis, you don't have to worry about it. Genesis tells us that God made everything that there is. It tells us about the relationship between God and His creation, especially us, but it is not concerned with the science or the history of it and what you deduce from the fossil record, monuments or other ancient documents has no fundamental bearing at all on our Christian faith.

February 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 18-20

Again human beings are not portrayed as the interlopers who somehow spoil things for the other animals. We name them. In a sense they are ours, but that always means that they are ours to care for. It is good to have farm animals. It is good to have pets. Maybe even zoos are sometimes good. Our lives are bound up with the lives of the animals and there no way of disentangling them. We are, however, responsible to the animals' Maker for the way we treat them.

February 25<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 22-24

We do need one another. We do need other human beings. The story of the creation of Eve is not to denigrate the woman as a spare rib. The woman is the same as the man. You can love your dog or cat and they may love you, but human love is qualitatively different. Men and women are literally made for each other. They are complementary. Some of us may be unmarried by choice or calling or because of lack of opportunity, but generally speaking, human beings are fulfilled as married couples. Some churches regard celibacy as the higher vocation, requiring, for example, priests to be celibate. Some other churches at the charismatic/evangelical of the spectrum so emphasise coupledness and family life that the unmarried are made to feel outsiders. Why can't we be sensible and accept ourselves and other people the way we are and trust God for our lives, whether He wants us to be married or single, what job we should do, where we should live, etc.?

February 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 22-24

Jesus quotes v24 when they ask Him about divorce (Mark 10<sup>2-12</sup>). His answer is that there ought to be no divorce because a married couple are one flesh. *Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.* You can raise all sorts of objections to that principle: cruelty, neglect, adultery, criminality, serious mental illness, addiction, even differences of religious belief. Why would it be right for someone who had taken the decision to marry a particular person at some stage in their life to be inextricably bound to that person if things worked out entirely differently from the way they had been expected to? On the other hand, when we are bad or bad things happen to us, we need people who will love us unconditionally. Can we have it both ways *till death us do part so long as it all works out right?*

February 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v25

*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.* When they eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil they are ashamed of being naked and cover themselves with fig leaves. In the picture in the children's Bible, Adam and Eve were portrayed standing behind bushes of appropriate height. Did they cover themselves when they learnt right from wrong because nakedness is in itself is something to be ashamed of or did they cover themselves because, whilst not sinful in itself, one's nakedness might tempt someone else into sin? It would of course always be wrong to tempt someone else into sin.

February 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v25

If it would be wrong to go naked because that might tempt other people to sin, surely it would be wrong to dress or make up alluringly in order to attract the opposite sex in a physical sense. Is there a difference between dressing attractively and dressing to attract? A lot is said about young women going out dressed in a manner calculated to draw attention to their sexuality. No that doesn't justify a man in raping such a young woman. On the other hand, is it wise? Does it indicate a sense of personal freedom or a desperate lack of self-respect? Is it either kind or sensible to send out mixed signals? In another context St Paul says, *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient* (I Corinthians 6<sup>12</sup>). Answers will differ according to the individuals concerned and the cultural milieu they inhabit. Which raises another question. Should we modern westerners dress in a manner which offends people of other cultures? When we are travelling in more buttoned up countries? When we are out and about in English city centres? When we are out and about in English cities with a large immigrant population from more buttoned up cultures? And if we should respect their cultural norms and cover up a bit more should they respect ours and cover up a bit less?

March 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 3 v1

From a biological point of view, I'm quite fascinated by snakes. There are so many different species. Many of them are very beautiful. Their form of locomotion is amazing. They have all kinds of adaptations to living in a wide variety of environments. And yet here the snake is symbol for Satan, the tempter, the accuser. Our flesh is meant to crawl and it does.

## March 2<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 3 v1

The devil is the father of lies (John 8<sup>44</sup>). In contrast Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14<sup>6</sup>). He promises that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth (John 16<sup>13</sup>). This contrast is so important. Maybe I'm just getting more sensitive to it as I get older, but increasingly it feels as if we are living in a cesspit of lies. In ordinary human relationships, lying is commonplace. In dealing with major corporations, commercial enterprises or local or national government, it is almost as if there were no such thing as truth. There is only public relations. What we the general public are told is what it suits them that we should believe. Truth or falsehood doesn't come into it. Note that the devil's lie in this verse is a half truth. It's good PR. You can't straightforwardly contradict it, yet somehow it manages to leave out the relevant fact. They could indeed eat of the fruit of every tree of the garden. No argument. Except that they MUST NOT eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

This is the pattern I've noticed when something goes badly wrong in a public sector organisation.

- 1) They deny that there is a problem.
- 2) They say they can't discuss it for reasons of confidentiality and/or national security.
- 3) They say they can't comment for legal reasons.
- 4) If you get past all that, they will try to answer your questions with half truths and platitudes.
- 5) If you push harder for answers you'll be told downright lies.
- 6) If, despite all that, you manage to prove wrong-doing, the most that happens is that some senior executive just might be persuaded to accept early retirement on a pension worth many times the salaries of most of the taxpayers who have got to pay for it.
- 7) They sack any whistleblower who actually told the public the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Jesus the Truth is also the Word of God *without whom was not anything made that was made* (John 1<sup>3</sup>). The universe coheres in Truth. Human society based on lies has gone to the devil and will surely die.

## March 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 2-5

The woman didn't fall at the first hurdle. She stuck out for the truth which the devil had tried to elide. Yes they could eat any fruit, but not the fruit of the tree of knowledge. So the devil had to carry on lying. One lie leads to another. *O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive.* It is often said that government departments get into more trouble when the cover up is exposed than they would have done if they'd owned up in the first place. So why don't they realise that *honesty is the best policy* and own up straightaway? Never mind principle. Even pragmatically, it does you less harm to be honest from the outset than to get caught adding the crime of covering up to the original crime. That bit of pragmatic advice, however, assumes that governments and local authorities don't get away with many more cover ups than they actually get caught for. Pragmatism isn't enough. It has to be recognised that *virtue is its own reward*. A good person feels good about *telling the truth and shaming the devil*. His conscience wouldn't allow him to enjoy a successful cover up. The devil questions that Adam and Eve will surely die if they eat the forbidden fruit. He promises that it will do them good. Similarly the devil whispers in the ear of politicians, officials and businessmen, *All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is given unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.* (Luke 4<sup>6&7</sup>). He was lying to Eve. He is lying today to the self-styled masters of the universe.

## March 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v6

We humans are social creatures. We like to share. We like to share good things. And we like to share guilt. On the one hand, Eve thought she was offering Adam something nice. On the other hand, by implicating him, she was off-loading some of the responsibility. It wouldn't be she alone standing before God.

*Everybody does it* sometimes seems like a justification for every misdemeanour. It isn't. We are individually responsible for our own actions. It is weakness to allow ourselves to be pressurised into wrong-doing by the crowd. There is no merit whatever in encouraging other people to participate with us in what we know is really wrong. It doesn't make it right if other people do it too.



### March 5<sup>th</sup> (Ash Wednesday)

Genesis 3 vv 7&8

Adam and Eve realised they had done wrong and hid from God – the very opposite of what they ought to have done. *The Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by his infinite goodness and mercy.* This is our special focus for Lent.

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### March 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 8&9

In the modern world we often see people as consumers or as potential consumers of religion. They are customers of the services of the Church. In the end, belief is a choice, and it doesn't much matter whether or not people choose to practise any particular religion, because God is far too nice to let what we think of Him affect the way He thinks of us. Actually, this attitude is quite wrong. God seeks us out. He longs for us. There is no escaping Him. Our relationship with God is the most significant thing about us. It determines how we behave, what kind of people we are and our eternal destiny. Jesus is not a consumer choice on a par with what kind of music you enjoy or whether you prefer rugby to association football.

### March 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v10

Hearing the Voice of God. Sometimes we seek to hear His Voice. We pray. We read the Bible. We share with other Christians. There are times when His Voice is clear and times when He doesn't seem to answer. We have to wrestle in prayer, believing that He is with us even though we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. And there are times when He speaks unexpectedly or even when, like Adam here, we don't particularly want to hear His Voice – maybe via our conscience.

### March 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 10-13

First of all Adam tries to justify himself. "I hid from you because I was naked and ashamed." When that piece of self justification fails, he tries to put the blame on others. So like a government department or a local council when it is caught out. But also like us as individuals. We try to justify ourselves when we really know we have done wrong. We try to pretend even to ourselves. If that fails, we blame other people or circumstances. "It's not really stealing when you fiddle your expenses. Everybody else is doing it." Failing to confront sin doesn't solve the problem. We just sink deeper into the mire. And the rules are no different for corporations from what they are for individuals. It's just as bad for a company or for the government to tell lies or to take unfair advantage of customers' or citizens' ignorance or naivety as it would be for you or me to do so as an individual. If we are to raise our own game and the game of the society we live in, we have to confront our wrong-doing, to admit it, to confess our sin. Only then can be washed clean and set free to make new beginning.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: but, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I John 1<sup>8&9</sup>.

### March 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 14&15

A lot of people have a horror of snakes and a lot of snakes are killed quite unnecessarily because people have an irrational excessive fear of them. Yes, some are dangerous and you need to treat them with respect, but there is no justification for wantonly destroying what are after all God's creatures. The association between snakes and the devil in this story suggests the origin of this irrational horror and explains the situation in which the snake in the grass bites the unwary person and human beings take a stick even to harmless snakes. Much more important is the fact that this story prefigures the conflict between Satan and the second Adam, Jesus. Mankind, at one with the Godhead, wins that round, the decisive round when Jesus offers Himself on the Cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

For Judah's Lion bursts his chains,  
Crushing the serpent's head;  
And cries aloud through death's domain  
to wake the imprisoned dead.

March 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v16

Human women certainly do seem to have more trouble giving birth than most mammalian species. Biologists attribute to the fact that we walk on two legs whereas the mammalian body plan is much better adapted to walking on four legs. The Bible associates the problem with human sin. Ultimately all our problems go back to our unsatisfactory relationship with God. He is the Maker. Things go awry when we don't follow the Maker's instructions. When discussing this passage, St Paul says, *Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety* (I Timothy 3<sup>15</sup>). The remedy for the consequences of sin is the opposite of sin.

March 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 17-19

I'm a bit bothered by this punishment. To me, work is a good thing. I am fulfilled by my work. I dread retirement. I've always felt like this. Even when I was at school I wanted to do a job that I would find fulfilling. Unemployment robs people of their reason for getting up in the morning. You often notice that the houses and gardens of the unemployed are in a much worse state than those of people working long hours. When you can do those odd jobs anytime, you somehow don't get round to doing them at all. Work as a punishment? Yes, but think of all those people for whom life is harsh. Millions of people have to do boring, nasty and dangerous jobs. Even so, they hardly make enough to make ends meet. There is not much dignity in labour if it leaves you shattered and impoverished. In Christ, the consequences of the Fall are unravelled. So, for Christian people, ensuring that people have decent jobs which pay a living wage is an imperative. You may try to achieve this by buying *fair trade* goods, by avoiding products which you believe were made in sweat shops, by the way you treat your own employees and suppliers if you run a business, by action through trades unions or political parties. The issues are often complex but that doesn't excuse us from doing our best.

March 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v19

There's always something in the papers about making healthy choices – what we should eat and drink, whether we should smoke, how much exercise we should take. All well and good but we are all going to die some time. Better be prepared for death!

March 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v20

*And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.* Evolutionary biologists also believe that all human beings are descended from one woman. This is the implication of our shared DNA. Probably best not to set too much store by this. Christian faith does not depend on the truth or otherwise of any particular scientific theory.

What is worth noting is how tremendously important Eve is. Without her, none of us would exist. Similarly Mary. Without her Jesus would not have been born and we would not have been redeemed. Christians and non-Christians alike are wont to claim that the Bible denigrates women because it does not portray them as the same as men. This is not so. Women are as vital to the Bible story as men are. They have roles which no man can take just as there are roles which are much more appropriate for men to take.

March 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v21

Adam and Eve (representing the whole human race) have just rejected God and His Law. As a result, they face the consequences of their actions. Actions do have consequences – something which is often elided. Public servants get away with covering up their mistakes and, even if they don't, they go unpunished. Teenagers who fail to hand in their assignments on time are given extensions. It is too much trouble to punish or to rehabilitate petty criminals. But all that we achieve is to defer the consequences. Public servants have lost public trust by their lies. School leavers find themselves unemployable because they don't see the need to accept responsibility for doing the job properly and punctually. Petty criminals become repeat offenders. Actions have consequences and it is not kind to pretend otherwise. *The wages of sin is death* (Romans 6<sup>23</sup>).

March 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v21

God is not, however, vindictive. He makes clothes for Adam and Eve to wear when they are forced out of Eden as a consequence of their actions. Corporations ought to be run in a way that supports employees in fulfilling their professional obligations. Schools should be helping teenagers to accept personal grown up responsibilities. Petty criminals should be assisted in becoming useful citizens. The aim is neither to punish nor to gloss over wrong-doing, but to bring about amendment of life.

March 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 22&23

Human beings are extremely powerful. Even though our bodies are weaker, more delicate, slower, less well-adapted for climbing or swimming, even though our senses of smell, sight and hearing are so much less impressive than many other creatures, we do dominate this planet. We might yet destroy it. We dominate one another. Violence in the home. Slavery. Oppression. Wars. We are extremely powerful and sinful humanity is capable of great evil. God curbs our potential for fear of what we could do. But He doesn't take away our freedom. Freedom is essential to our flourishing as human beings. If we are not free to choose the bad, neither are we free to choose the good. Love cannot be compelled. God gives us the freedom we need if we are to be wholly human and it is worth the price we pay in suffering the consequences of our sin. God could have created a world of perfect robots. Instead He created a world of free people. Presumably He knew what He was doing!

March 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v24

We can't find our way back to Eden. We can't pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We are helpless. *Behold I was shapen in wickedness: and in sin hath my mother conceived me* (Psalm 51<sup>5</sup>). We are all born into original sin. It is only the initiative of God which can bring us back. God reaches out to us in love. *Where art thou?* He sends His Son Jesus into the world to redeem us. He pours out His Holy Spirit. Only God can save us. And He does. What is required of us is to accept in faith God's free gift of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. *The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 6<sup>23</sup>).

March 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 1&2

So there we have it. Family life right at the beginning of the Bible, the story of the human race. With all its joys and all its sorrows, the family has always been the building block of human society. The love of husband and wife creates an environment in which children may be born and brought up in love. Parental and sibling ties are lifelong. *For better, for worse; for richer for poorer; in sickness and in health*. Have we become more individualistic on the one hand – having children without making the commitment of marriage, divorcing if things don't work out and, on the other hand, readier to hand over the care of family members to the state?

March 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v2

If you enjoy watching Westerns, you'll be familiar with the conflict between the cattle men and the farmers. Where conditions are arid and pasture is scarce, you need to keep moving your flocks and herds across the open range to find food and water. But the *tiller of the ground* wants to remain in one place. He doesn't want his ground trampled by animals. He puts up fences. It is not possible ever to please everyone. There has to be negotiation, give and take, settling for less than you wanted but more than you'd get if the other person got all that he wanted. As they grow up together, children have to learn to share, to make allowances for one another. It is often fraught especially for the parents, but these lessons have to be learnt or tragedy ensues.

March 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 3-7

Brothers are often jealous of one another, competing for the parents' attention. In this case they are both apparently trying to please God. Is the problem that Abel's offering is more valuable than Cain's? I think it is more likely that it is a question of the spirit in which the offerings were made. Jesus says, *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Matthew 5<sup>23&24</sup>). This is why the invitation to Communion is to those who are in love and charity with their neighbours, because St Paul says, *For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body* (I Corinthians 11<sup>29</sup>). I take *not discerning the Lord's body* to mean failing to recognise the Bread of life in the Sacrament and failing to recognise that all your fellow Christians comprise with you the Body of Christ.

March 21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 8&9

Judas was present at the Last Supper and went out to betray his Master. The rejection of Cain's unworthy sacrifice led him to murder Abel. We have to be careful how we handle holy things. Frequent Holy Communion is not *chips with everything*. Neither ought we to be casual in less formal family services or fresh expressions or to treat choral Mattins or Evensong like a concert. God is really present where two or three are gathered together in His Name. It is dangerous to take that Name in vain.

March 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 4 v9

*Am I my brother's keeper?*

Cain asks this question right at the beginning of human history. He expects the answer *No*. Why should he be expected to look after his brother? But the answer is always *Yes*. We are our brother's keeper. We are supposed to love our neighbour as ourselves. And *who is my neighbour?* Well, *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves...*(Luke 11<sup>30</sup>). You know the rest!

March 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 11-13

America is one of the most Christian nations on earth in terms of the proportion of the population attending Church and the proportion of their time, talents and money which they put into religious activities. Yet it also has the death penalty. Some American Christians point to biblical passages which require a life for a life to justify this situation. But the first murderer is not punished with death. He has to take the consequences of his action, but he is exiled, not executed and God still takes care of him. God *desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live*. The death penalty takes away that opportunity. I don't believe that it has any place in a civilised society. Punishment is about being made to pay for what you've done to your victim, but it's also about reclaiming the offender. Effective punishment is justice for the sinned against and a deterrent to others tempted to sin similarly and it also restores the sinner to righteousness. The system fails when it fails in any of those three aspects of punishment.

March 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 13-15

The phrase the *mark of Cain* seems to have changed meaning. People seem to use the phrase nowadays to mean an indelible stain, a mark of guilt, a warning to others to shun this person. But in the Bible the mark God put on Cain is to protect him. In those days there was no police force and "neighbourhood watch" administered justice themselves. The community might well have taken on itself the responsibility to inflict the death penalty on a murderer, but God protects Cain. From the beginning we have this precedent for the treatment of offenders. Murderers are precious to God as well as murder victims. If we are Christ-like, as we are called to be, murderers are precious to us too.

March 25<sup>th</sup> (The Annunciation)

Genesis 4 vv 16&17

In the old days, when most people still knew bible stories, it was not uncommon for some drunk in a pub to come up to a clergyman and demand how Cain could get married if Adam and Eve were the only people? Being drunk, he probably wouldn't remember the next day how you answered him, and if he was just trying to catch you out rather than seeking a sensible answer there was probably no point in trying to tell him anyway – except that Christians don't reject anyone.

As I have said, these chapters of Genesis are not straightforward history, any more than they are physics, chemistry or biology. They are stories which help us to understand profound truths about our relationships with God and with one another.

Most people make sense of life from stories. That's why TV soaps are so popular. It's why we pass down our family story to our children and we include their husbands or wives in our family when we tell them the stories about when we were young and our parents and grandparents. We tell the story of our nation because it is the story of the people we are. That is why the school history curriculum is so contentious. The way we teach our history depends on what sort of people we want to be thought of as. Jesus Himself taught in parables. In His Life, Death & Resurrection, Jesus acts out the love of God. It's not an abstract theory; it's a concrete reality.

We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 18-22

This is where people often give up when they've decided to read the bible through from the beginning to the end – all these hard names and not much story. God has, however, caused all holy scripture to be written for our learning. So we shouldn't give up entirely on these drier parts. They are considering how there came to be all the different crafts and skills that a more civilised society would require.

March 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 23&24

You'd like to know more about the background to this story. Who was the young man Lamech killed? What were the circumstances? Was it an accident? Was it self-defence? I get the impression that Lamech feels hard done by that he is in this position. He doesn't (to my way of thinking) talk like a guilty man. Given the rough justice of those days when the "neighbourhood watch committee" or the victim's male relations would take it on themselves to execute a murderer, you needed some mechanism to protect the accused from injustice. Much later on, there would be special cities of refuge, where a fugitive from rough justice could find sanctuary until the hue and cry had died down. Suppose two men were cutting down trees in the woods and one wound up dead with an axe head in his chest, was it murder or might the head have accidentally come off the axe? The victim's family might not be prepared to believe it was an accident. Or again if one man attacked another man and was killed by the person defending himself, the dead man's family might be too full of anger and resentment to consider the matter fairly. So there had to be a cooling off period. If the person on proper enquiry was found to be guilty he would be handed over to the community for punishment, but, if not, he could stay in the city of refuge and no one could touch him.

Even today with DNA analysis, CCTV, etc., it is not always straightforward to find out the truth about an alleged crime. There have been some dreadful miscarriages of justice when the public has demanded a result following some terrible event, the police have got the wrong man, and a jury has found him guilty. There have also been awful cases which have not got that far, but a suspect's reputation has been destroyed in the press or on the internet before he has even come to trial and then perhaps the charges are dropped because someone else is convicted or the original suspect is found to be not guilty by a court. There is always a danger that public outrage at a crime will lead to the conviction and punishment of the wrong person. There is also the danger that a desire for vengeance takes over and the guilty person is punished excessively. The bible allows no more than an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. *Lock him up and throw away the key* is not an option in a Christian country – no matter how evil he might be. The punishment has to fit the crime (a rational calculation) not reflect our sense of outrage (which is an emotional response.)

March 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 25&26

In the bible story all these descendants of Cain aren't going to survive the Flood. There has to be a new beginning from the family of Adam and Eve. So they have another son and this son is called Seth.

Professor Sam Berry who is both a biologist and a Christian thinker has an interesting theory about all this. He is aware that the fossil record indicates that there other humanoid creatures other than our ancestors. We are *Homo sapiens*, but there are also fossils of Neanderthals and *Homo erectus* etc.. Could it be that these were all like the animals and that it was only Adam's family into whom God breathed the breath of life? Only *Homo sapiens* were made in God's image. We alone became a living soul. All those other human species then died out and Adam's family, *Homo sapiens*, we, alone were left?

It is possible, but my own feeling, is that it is better not to try to reconcile the Genesis story with scientific accounts of our origins. They may well both be true, but they approach the question from very different perspectives. In fact they are not really seeking to answer the same questions and they certainly employ very different methods. Biology is interested in our physical bodies and it relies on physical evidence and rational thought to answer the questions it poses. The Bible is concerned with the essence of our humanity which is our relationship with God and with one another. The answers to these questions - and indeed the questions themselves - are revealed by God in Scripture as well as in nature, and above all they are revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, and they – the answers and the questions - require faith as well as reason in order to be apprehended.

March 29<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 5 vv 1-3

Seth is in Adam's image and likeness. So were Cain and Abel. What happened to them was the consequence of original sin. Humanity, made in God's image, the image of love, had rejected God's perfect Law of Love and the consequence was murder. We had rendered ourselves helpless. But this was not to be the end of the story. Seth was born and in Seth the image and likeness of God continue. The image and likeness of God continue down through the generations. You and I are made in the image and likeness of God. This implies dignity. We should never doubt our self worth. It also implies humility, the result of a true assessment of ourselves, absolutely dependent on Him Who is absolutely dependable. The consideration that everybody else is also made in the image and likeness of God determines our responsibility towards other people. In Luke 3<sup>38</sup> the lineage of Jesus is traced back to *Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God*. What we are in Christ (the children of God) is what we were created for.

March 30<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 5 vv 4-24

What most impresses people when they read these verses are the hard names and the tremendous life spans of the people listed. No I can't explain them and I'm not going to try. The person to whom I want to draw attention is Enoch because Enoch walked with God. He is mentioned three times in the New Testament – in the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3, as a prophet in Jude 14 and as an example of a man of faith in Hebrews 11<sup>5</sup>. There is a Book of Enoch to which Jude may be referring. It certainly does not go back to the beginning of the Old Testament, probably being written near enough to the time of the New Testament. In what sense it might be thought to connect to the Enoch of Genesis I can't really say. It is because Enoch walked with God that he is honoured in later times and it is for that reason that the prophetic book was attributed to him. Maybe in some sense it was felt to be inspired by him.

Enoch walked with God in two senses. Walking with God is a very nice analogy for leading the good life. Jews talk about the הלכה (halakah). It is the interpretation of the Law. Literally it is to go with God, to walk with God. When we walk with God we live in accordance with His Will. We keep His commandments. He accompanies us on life's journey.

Jesus is our beginning and our end. He is our companion on the way. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Christian faith, the Christian life is described as the Way. To walk in the way is to walk with God. Enoch was such a man of faith that we walked to the end of his life with God and walked with God straight to heaven. Only Enoch, Elijah and Jesus are described in the bible as doing this.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11<sup>5&6</sup>).

March 31<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 5 vv 25-32

We leave the story with the arrival of Noah. The bible story is not a story of the Ascent of Man. It is not a self-help book. It doesn't encourage you to think that you can overcome all the odds and by your own efforts come out on top. It is not a manual for success. There is no facile singing, *Things can only get better!* Creation was followed by the Fall. The first two sons Cain and Abel are eliminated from the scene by Cain's sin. The much less well-known Seth becomes the progenitor of the human species, but when people multiply, they go badly wrong again and the human race is wiped out in the Flood – except for Noah who turns out to be a drunkard. And so it goes on. The bible story is of human failure and faithlessness. It was no different then from what it is now. We do know what sort of people we ought to be, but we do not live up to the heavenly vision. We are faithless and sinful, weak and helpless. *Behold I was shapen in wickedness: and in sin hath my mother conceived me*. However the bible story is also the story of the faithfulness of God. He never gives up on us. In generation after generation, He reaches out to His world. He gives us the Law. He sends the prophets. At last He sends His Son. The Son sends the Spirit and He gives us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to perfect us, to minister to build us up as the Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4<sup>11&12</sup>). God never ceases to reach out to us in love. All we have to do is respond. *The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*.