

Sermon 5th March 2017. Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 Romans 5: 12-19 Matthew 4: 1-11

You nearly didn't get a sermon today, I did think about standing here and reading the first 1,500 words of my dissertation. My dissertation is on the role Eve had in the fall of humanity, and Mary's role in creating a redemption for ourselves that doesn't depend on men. I think it is important that the patristic church no longer teaches that women are second class and inferior to men and so therefore should submit to men. I also believe that we as women can claim a redemption of our own by the empowerment that we receive from these two very different women who are important to us. Eve is always used as a reason why humankind were thrown out of Eden. There is no denying that she had a role to play, but then again she is not entirely responsible. I'm sorry but are we to believe that men are so weak willed that when a woman tempts them they cannot say no. If this is the case, then surely this proves that women are in fact the stronger sex. It is more likely the lies that were told to, God by both parties, that led to the eviction, When God discovers them hiding he asks them why? They reply because we are naked. God now knows that they have sinned. Instead of behaving like responsible adults and admitting they were at fault, they take to blaming one another, until Adam makes the crucial mistake of blaming God for their sinning. "The woman you gave to me" Adam tells God is the one who sinned first, implying that if God hadn't made woman the sin wouldn't have happened. Some misogynists would say this is true, women are the cause of all the world's problems, others would argue that because woman was made from a bent rib you couldn't expect her to be perfect, after all you cannot create perfection from something that is clearly deformed in the first place. Whatever your own personal beliefs it is in fact the breaking down of the relationship between Adam, Eve and God that is the cause of all that goes wrong with humanity. If only they had apologised and not tried to blame God then maybe things would be different. We are taught that we are forgiven when we sin, if we seek and are truly repent,

The majority of the christian world have moved on from the first stories written in Genesis, they accept them for what they are just that stories. There is to my knowledge no historical evidence for what took place in the garden, but the repercussions are damaging for some women in our society. Some men use this story to manipulate and blame women. They take the chapters of Genesis which tell the story of the fall to keep women subservient and subjected to man. They oppress women, beat them and in some cases compel them into doing things that are harmful both mentally and physically to their wellbeing. This doesn't just happen in third world countries, it happens in the western world as well. In many areas of the working world there are women who are well educated and strong willed, who won't and shouldn't back down when they strongly believe in something. In some cases they are vilified and bullied into either leaving work through ill health, or standing down because they feel unsupported. What do these male misogynists gain from treating women in this way? Are they so full of their own sense of worthlessness that it makes them feel better to belittle and bully those they consider to be the weaker sex. The worse kind of misogynist are those who hide behind scripture, or make up excuses for their own behaviour instead of being truthful and admitting they don't like and cannot deal with strong women. Until men and women come together to proclaim a gospel that treats men and women equal in all walks of life, then we are not truly preaching or living out the

covenant that was made through Christ dying for us. The new covenant that we love one another just as he as loved us.

Galatians 3: 28 tells us that God created us all equal, "there is neither jew nor greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Jesus created for us a new covenant and if we break this new covenant, then we have to ask ourselves the question are we actually behaving any better than Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.

Lent is traditionally the time of year when we all try to give something up, be that chocolate or alcohol. Some of us will succeed others will fail miserably. Those that believe they will fail before they have even begun may decided to take up the new trend that happens in Lent, the forty acts of random kindness. Each day you have to do one nice thing for someone else, it can be a family member or friend, if it's someone you don't know even better. Whatever you choose to do, lent should be a time of preparation and exploration. We should be examining our own lives and working out what is still relevant and what we need to let go of. It is tempting to keep doing the same old thing time and time again because that is what we do. The challenge is to look and find new ways of engaging with scripture and one another. Try a different style of worshipping, read a different form of daily office, try looking at the celtic forms of office, or St. Chad's. If you don't normally attend stations of the cross, try it. Come on a powerful journey of looking beyond the icons on the walls and into the struggles that Jesus and his followers faced and find the relevance to your own journey. Sometimes in the quietness and stillness of the church on a Monday evening you can have the most profound and intimate conversation with God, when you open yourself up and let him in, not into the busyness of life but into the stillness. Jesus spent forty days in the desert alone and in communion with God. The quite didn't last because he was soon tempted by the devil. It is in the quiet and stillness that the devil creeps in and tempts us. Jesus was strong enough to recognise the devil for who he was and to turn away from temptation. How many of us can claim the same. If you were alone and in communion with God and you were offered something you longed for, would you know if it was God giving you what you wanted or if it was the devil tempting you? Where are you on your own faith journey? and where are you in your relationship with God? Are you an Adam, or an Eve or are you strong like Jesus who was so confident he knew when his father spoke that you can resist temptation. Lent is a time for discovering what works for you, don't be afraid to let go of things that no longer work, don't be afraid to challenge yourself, take up your cross this lent examine it, work on it and move forward on your journey with Christ, otherwise you lead yourself open to temptation and spiritual death and that is not good for the church or the individual.

Amen