

So, this is the third week in our series of looking at Genesis. The last couple of weeks we've heard the two accounts of the creation of the world. As Amy mentioned last week - both quite different in their focus but both tell of the perfect world God created.

Then, comes chapter 3 that we've just heard.

We're only 3 chapters in and already the story has taken a turn.

This is the story of Adam and Eve which can be, at times, almost fairytale like in terms of how we think of it. A story full of magical gardens, talking snakes, juicy red apples and fig leaves to cover the bits that aren't suitable for children's illustrations.

In contrast, it can also be seen as a story of doom. Human failure and a condemning God full of judgement that quite frankly doesn't make Christianity very appealing.

'The Fall' as it's been titled in the NIV Bible or 'Human Disobedience' in the Good News - both very ominous names for a part of the bible that isn't particularly comfortable, for Christians as well as non-Christians.

Whether this particular story of Adam and Eve happened exactly as it was written or whether it is a metaphor for God and people's relationship isn't something I'm going to try and unpack because I don't feel like it matters particularly to what I want to speak about.

People are Broken

Original sin and the concept of 'sin' in its most negative sense has been something society associates with a judgemental church. Often characterised in TV or film as an adult - school teacher, priest, Nun, Monk, whatever their occupation, someone who should have been protecting and guiding the people often children in their care, instead, condemning them for their sinful nature, passing judgement on them, dismissing them as too damaged for God to love. As a result, that can be the perception of Christians - condemners of people. And with original sin and its link to baptism the condemners of children and babies before they've even had a chance in life.

This has definitely been something that the church has been guilty of and just this week the Church of England has given its latest public

apology to LGBTQ+ people for the “rejection, exclusion and hostility” they have faced in churches and the impact this has had on their lives.

The church and Christians definitely aren't perfect and just as flawed as Adam and Eve.

When this bible reading was given to me my first reaction was, oh no! - it is my daughters baptism, a lovely family occasion. Genesis 3, a chapter of the Bible not only about sin but the origin of all the worlds sin, is a bit heavy.

But then I took some time and prayed about it and hopefully this won't be a talk filled with negativity and awkwardness.

Because what Genesis 3 does highlight, which I suspect everyone here today can relate to, is human brokenness.

The Jesus Story book bible version of Genesis 3 (because I wouldn't be a true children's minister without sliding a couple of children's books into a talk) I think explains the brokenness in this story really well. It says,

'They had broken God's heart. They had broken their wonderful relationship with him and now, he knew everything else would break. God's creation would start to unravel, and come undone, and go wrong.'

All people, humans on earth have broken bits. We see evil and good, we try to judge for ourselves what is evil and what is good. We all sin, however we feel about the word itself, - we act out of jealousy, sadness, frustration, fear for the unknown, grief, trauma from the past. We act against others.

Not one of us can say we always act out of love.

That is not controversial.

The brokenness of the world is plastered over newspaper headlines, across social media and reported multiple times a day on the TV and radio.

How many of us in the last couple of years have had to not listen to or read the news because the barrage of negativity and bad things happening in the world isn't good for our mental health. It's certainly something I have made the conscious decision to do at times.

The extent of individual and collective human brokenness can be completely overwhelming.

There is a whole industry of self-help and self-improvement built on our brokenness. At this time of year in particular, it booms, new year, new me.

And its big business - according to Grand View Research in 2021 the self-help industry worldwide was worth an est. 41.8 billion dollars with an estimated annual growth rate of 5.5%.

We all have bits of us that we want to change and improve - that's not necessarily a bad thing - trying to be a better, more selfless and kind person. The best version of ourselves. That's a good thing.

But there is also the shame side - the bits of ourselves we rather the rest of the world not see, that we try and hide or bury, that make us feel inadequate, or that we are harder to love because of them.

That's what Adam and Eve saw when they ate the fruit in the garden of Eden - they saw their flaws.

They were naked - the story mentions they are ashamed of their physical nakedness and tried to hide it from God but also I think we can take from this that they also realised their inner nakedness too.

They, for the first time, realise they have been completely emotionally bare with God and their act of disobedience has broken the closeness that allowed them to be completely open with God.

God knows that we are broken, that the world is broken.

We know from Chapters 1 & 2 that it wasn't what God intended when he created the world but it's now the reality of how it is.

Disconnected from God

This leads quite nicely on to my second point. This story talks of our disconnect with God.

Verse 5 says 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

They did eat the fruit and gained the knowledge that God has, the knowledge of good and evil.

If people are like God and have the knowledge of God then its easy to rationalise that there is no need for God, that his existence has no relevance in our lives.

So, we disconnect the line.

We can make those judgements and decisions for ourselves.

With the state of the world around us - how does that seem to be going?

That is not how we were made to be.

People are made for connection, connections with each other, connections with nature and the natural world and connection with God.

Within connection, we thrive but without connection, we flounder.

We felt and saw the impact of lack of personal connections and interaction in the pandemic.

Loneliness has such an impact on our mental and physical health.

People are made for connection.

Connection with other people. Connection with God.

However, we can sometimes view a connection or relationship with God being something that is restrictive, rule bound, freedom lacking and so it doesn't appeal and we distance ourselves from it.

But ever increasingly people are talking about the importance of boundaries in life. Healthy boundaries - **the limits you place around your time, emotions, body, and mental health to stay resilient, solid, and content with who you are.** These empowering borders protect you from being used, drained, or manipulated by others.

Amy last week talked about this a little with the rules that God placed on the Garden of Eden. The first restriction or rule from God about what people could or couldn't do. Boundaries to guide them with how to navigate the world around them. Yes, he didn't want them to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge but all the other trees were freely available to them.

It's something that if you have children or have worked with children you'll see first-hand that boundaries can be helpful. Boundaries allow

children to thrive. Children without boundaries often end up displaying negative behaviour because they feel lost, adrift, flailing - sometimes quite literally - around trying to make sense of life.

Children want to know their place in the world, know the limits of people and places around them. Know the expectations of what they can do and know who they can rely on. And so as grown-ups we create these boundaries for them, which they'll often test or try to stretch, but if you have a good relationship with them, a strong connection, then they know you are doing it for the right reasons and this allows them to feel safe, They allow them to thrive.

So when you look at it from that perspective the boundaries God sets us can do the same for us. After all we are children of God. Made for connection with him even when we decide not to.

This is only the beginning of the story

If Genesis 3 was the end of the story it would be pretty depressing, the rejection, the anger, the brokenness and the disconnection.

Thankfully its only the very beginning of the story -

Here at St Tim's when someone is baptised, they are given a book of a bible story. One of the books that is given to children is called The Garden, the Curtain and the Cross.

This book, is one of my favourite Christian children's books. The Garden, the Curtain and the Cross is the story of the whole bible (but a lot shorter). Its beautifully illustrated and explains a very complicated story arc in a way that children can understand.

As you can see from the title - the garden is only the beginning of the story.

People became broken, distant and disconnected from God but he didn't give up on us.

I'm not going to read the whole book but read a small excerpt:

Then, one day God the son came to live in this world as a person.

He was called Jesus.

Jesus always did what God said.

Jesus never sinned.

And Jesus visited the temple where the keep out curtain hung.
Jesus knew that things were sometimes bad and sometimes sad.
Jesus said that God has sent him to open the way back to God's wonderful place, where there would be nothing bad and no one sad!
People still didn't want to let God be in charge.
So they decided to put Jesus on a cross to die.
It was the most bad thing that had ever happened.
It was the most sad day of all time.

But...

Jesus has a plan. He had always planned to die on the cross. What a strange plan!

Why would God's Son plan to die?

On the cross, Jesus took our sin. All the bad things we do, and the sad things they cause.

Jesus took them all from us.

And when he did, something amazing, astounding happened...

The curtain tore (that's the temple curtain)

God ripped up the Keep out sign!

God's wonderful place is open again!

Because Jesus dies, we can go in!

...

And Jesus has sent everyone an invitation to come and live with him there too!

He tells us,

God says it is wonderful to live with him. Because of your sin, you can't come in. BUT I died on the cross to take your sin... So all my friends Can now come in!

Jesus - God on earth.

He came.

John 3: 16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to SAVE the world through him.

He lived amongst people, real people, broken people. He showed the example of what it is to always act out of love.

And then he made the ultimate sacrifice - he died for our sins.

By doing so re-established the connection between people and God.

He's the BT engineer of the Bible. He re-established that connection but didn't leave it at that.

After his return to heaven, he sent the holy spirit. So not only do we have a connection with God but we have it as WiFi

- the best kind of WiFi -

100G, ultimate speed, constant connection, available everywhere even in the most remote parts of the world.

Available to us always, that we may have a relationship with God, a personal one to one friendship with God, if we want to let him in.

When Jesus died he didn't remove our capability to do the bad and sad things - this world is still broken.

Instead, he said 'I know you are broken, I love you anyway,

I know you aren't perfect, I love you anyway,

I know you have done things you aren't proud of, I love you anyway,

I know you'll probably do things in the future that are selfish and unkind but... I love you anyway.

I love you, I will always love you'

We are saved by his grace.

There is nothing we can do that will make him love us anymore.

There is nothing we can do that can make him love us any less.

He loves us completely and utterly. He wants to have an intimate relationship with us, he wants to be by our side through the good times, through the bad times.

The fall broke God's heart - his perfect world created for people was broken by them. God's people who he made perfectly in his image were broken.

But he never gave up.

He never gives up on us.

Through Jesus the connection was re-established and by the holy spirit, he is with us.

Today, on Thea's baptism, we aren't here because we think she needs to be cleansed from sin.

We're here because we want her to have that connection with God.

We know she won't be perfect, that as much as we'd love her life to always be happy it won't be.

There'll be challenges, and sadness, and times when she feels that things are broken. Times that she will feel broken - even though just the idea of that already breaks my heart.

We want her to know that she is a child of God. That she has God with her to navigate through the brokenness of the world, through her slip ups and challenges. So that she knows that whatever happens she is loved, she is saved by grace. So that she doesn't ever feel that she can't come to God - however she feels or whatever she has done.

Genesis 3 and words said as part of the baptism service today remind us that we are far from perfect but that we are truly loved by God and he longs to have the intimate connection with us that he intended to have with all people at the beginning of creation.

So much so he sent Jesus - God made flesh to restore the connection between God and people through his death.

We are saved by grace -

He loves us anyway.

Amen