Sermon for Sunday 20th February 2022,

2nd Sunday before Lent by The Rev’d Graham Phillips

Genesis 2.4-9, 15-25

Luke 8.22-25

Here in the reading from Genesis we have the second account of the creation of the world. It compliments the first account but has a different emphasis. In the first account, human beings are made by God speaking and are made in the image of God. In this account the first man, Adam, is formed from the dust of the ground. The animals are also formed from the dust of the ground. The difference is that the breath of life, the spirit of God - The Hebrew word for breath is also the same word for spirit - is breathed into the man and this is what made him a living being. Just as in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of bones, it is only when the breath of life, the Spirit of God is breathed into them that they become alive. So the first human being only becomes alive when the breath of life, the Spirit of God is breathed into him.

At his baptism, the Spirit of God came upon Jesus, and he began his ministry, filled with the power of the Spirit. When Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, in his hometown of Nazareth, the verse that he chooses, begins with “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” On the day of Pentecost, the disciples begin their ministry because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter tells the vast crowd that they must repent of their sins, be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ so that their sins may be forgiven and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2.38)

The breath of life, the spirit of life, made the first human being alive and it makes us fully alive now. The Hebrew word for life - chay (pronounced khah’ee) תי translates into the Greek word *ζωή (Zōē) (dzo-ay')*and the Greek Scholar Joseph Thayer expands its meaning saying that it is used in scripture in two ways:

Firstly Of natural life.

Secondly Of the life of the Kingdom of God, the present life of grace that we live in now, and the life of glory which is to follow, the life in heaven beyond this life. Thayer goes on to describe it is life that is real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God. That is life worth holding on to.

So God places this fully alive man into a garden in the centre of which is the tree of life and also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warns the man not to eat the fruit from this latter tree, otherwise he will die - the life that he has will be taken from him. If we do not have the Spirit of God within us we too are lifeless, living without the knowledge of God’s salvation, grace and love. It is reassuring that at baptism we pray for a daily renewing of the anointing Spirit.

God decides that the man needs a helper, a soul mate, a partner, and so the man is encouraged to name all the living creatures, in the search for this helper. In doing this the man is bringing his order into the world and claiming authority over all the creatures and birds. Yet none of them are suitable as a helper for the man.

We may ask the question as to why in this second creation account, the man and woman are not made together? At the same time? Why does he have to search through all the other creatures without success? It may have been to affirm in man his need for companionship, with someone who is like him. Likewise we have a need for companionship, for being part of a community, we all need relationships with other human beings in order to flourish, to thrive, to support each other.

So God steps in and Woman is created by God from Man, there is an eternal link between them, one made from the other. This points to the unique and special relationship between husband and wife, that the two are joined together and become one flesh, spiritually joined symbiotically in the union of their bodies, their wills and their minds.

And the garden that they are placed in is a safe, secure space where all their needs are met and where they can learn their responsibilities in the world, and can learn obedience to God and free will. The womb is created to be a safe space, as is the nuclear family - protected environments in which children are born and raised to fulfil their potential in Christ. Sadly as we read on we learn that the first man and woman disobeyed God and were thrown out of that safe, protected garden. And sadly many people today do not know the security of God’s love.

In the Gospel reading Jesus displays both his humanity and his divinity. He is tired, exhausted probably from the demands of the crowds, and he is sound asleep in a boat in a storm. Wow, he must have been tired. He is perfectly at peace, trusting that all will be well while his disciples, including the experienced sailors are absolutely terrified and rightly so for the boat is filling with water and they are in danger. “Master, Master,” they shout, “We are perishing”. They recognise Jesus’s authority over them by calling him Master but they have not learnt to trust God in every situation however dire and they have not learnt who Jesus is.

Do we know who Jesus is? Have we learnt to trust Him, to trust God? Even when the storm is raging around us and the waves are swamping the boat? Our current International storm is the possibility of war in Ukraine. A week ago i had a sense of God saying that he was in control that war will not happen. Today I am struggling to hold on to this. It is as if the certainty of peace i had last week has been eroded away by what I see on the news. Yet when I am still in God’s presence, ignoring what I see and hear then I can receive afresh the sense of God saying war will not happen. Time will tell.

Many people are going through their own personal storms - diminishing health, rising cost of living, an unexpected sudden change of events,  perhaps damage from storm Eunice. In situations like this it is hard to look beyond the natural, to not be swamped by what we experience.

In the Gospel Story, on being woken up, Jesus immediately takes control of the situation, rebukes the wind and the waves. He has authority over the elements. Just as God in the Old Testament had authority over the plagues in Egypt, over the waters at the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho, the drought called by Elijah and the rain when they came after three years, so Jesus had authority over the wind and the waves and he can exercise that authority in our lives in our situation.

Earlier in Luke’s gospel we have read of demons calling Jesus the Son of the most high God, read of his healing of everyone who came for help, the raising from the dead of the son of the widow of Nain, Jesus calling God his Father, forgiving sins which only God was allowed to do. Bit by bit, piece by piece the jigsaw is becoming whole. The full humanity and full divinity of Jesus is being revealed. We are building to the climax of Luke 9.20- You are the Messiah of God and God’s words in the transfiguration, “This is my Son, the Chosen, listen to him!” Luke 9.35.

Jesus asked his disciples, “Where is your faith?” When we are in a crisis, in a storm, we need to help each other listen to God, to trust that He will bring us through. We need the assurance of God being with us, that he does not sleep, that he has got us in the palm of his hands, that His purposes will be brought about. We need the affirmation that the breath of life, the Spirit of God is within us, that God does not abandon us, but leads us out of the darkness into the light. I shall finish with verses from the start of John’s gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” John 1.2-4

Amen

Blessings