

**2024-02-18 ... 6.30pm Evensong Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands**

**Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7; Romans 5: 12 -19**

I start my consideration of tonight's readings from the view that this Genesis story was the development over time of a people who wanted to explain 'the beginning' in the context of having God at the centre of that story.

I think those who thought this story, and we might these many years later agree with this hypothesis, thought that God would not have made an imperfect world – that at the beginning of time there was no understanding by humankind that there could be any approach to life other than one where there was just goodness. And they had this story of the Tree of Knowledge represent the moment that things turned.

But these first humans who only knew goodness have many other characteristics which we recognise. These first humans are described as (in no particular order) having an understanding of responsibility (Adam has to name the animals), of work (the land is to be tilled), of needing help (the woman was to be a helper as his partner), an appreciation of beauty (with creation being described in terms of precious jewels) and what turns out to be the problematic characteristic – curiosity.

And what happened when that piece of fruit was eaten? They became dissatisfied with the gifts of God. And it seems we only became less than perfect when we understood that there was another option.

Can we imagine a life where knowledge wasn't something to be sought after – it's something which we're good at pursuing and which brings great benefits? Clearly Eve was already a seeker, someone who wanted to explore, to satisfy her curiosity. The turn was not a clear cut rejection of what was good, more an unanticipated consequence.

You could tie yourself in knots trying to figure out what actually happened on that fateful day.

But Adam is the way the faith story explains that life is full of suffering, of us not living up to even our own expectations of ourselves, and our seeming inability to live in accordance with the moral and spiritual laws we wish to uphold.

Even without the effects of serious non-conformers to these rules, the biggest baddies and evildoers of this world, the impact of all the small shortcomings of each and every one of us is cumulative and the spiral downward seems impossible to counteract.

And this is where Jesus steps into the story. And in particular his death and resurrection. Jesus is the hope of the life to come – yes, eternal life – but also life that begins in the next minute, next hour, tomorrow. In Jesus I can apologise for that thing I just did that made life worse for you. You can learn to forgive me. God's forgiveness enables me to think that there is a point to doing the right thing next time. Slowly the world improves as we exercise love. That is the wonder of God's grace. Thank God.