

Several years ago, there was quite a head of steam to include, within the yearly Lectionary cycle of readings, one Sunday with an environmental focus. This wasn't to be like Harvest which is usually a thanksgiving for food, but a way of rejoicing and giving thanks for Creation itself – for everything that God has made.

And so, tucked into the Sundays before Lent is a kind of 'Green Wellie Sunday', celebrated in a myriad of ways. A friend of mine with a scientific background talks about rock formations and global warming; agriculturalists talk about the development of disease resistant crops for the Developing world and biologists about embryology. At a completely different level fundamentalists will try to tell us that this passage of Creation is literally true.

For myself, this second chapter of Genesis is a deeply theological piece of writing with more themes than you can wiggle a stick at. I will leave you to read the scientific commentaries for yourself and to don your green wellies elsewhere. For now, and very briefly I want to reflect on the stricture in v9: *You may eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you shall eat of it, you shall die.*

On Friday evening I was asked to go and bless a new house. As you know the Packington Estate is being redeveloped and a family had moved off the Square into one of the really nice new houses in Dame Street. One of the children in the house, aged nine, was as sharp as a razor and asked me two questions: *How come God could make everything out of nothing and why is there a devil?*

And so without any knowledge of what we might talk about today, Latoyah put her finger on the crunch issue: why do we have this story about how our Creator God put a tree in the Garden – with all these powers - and then forbid Adam to eat its fruit? What kind of infantile dependence did he seem to want in Adam; and what kind of person would set up a test or a trap of this kind? Moreover, why did he tell a lie?

Of course these are the wrong questions: the story as written is not intended to answer these enquiries at all but rather to try to tell us where sin came from and to place the responsibility for that fairly

and squarely on the shoulders of (in descending order), the serpent, Eve and then Adam.

But we cannot be fobbed off so easily. What other significance can the tree have but to stand for the way that ethical and moral decision-making fell into the hands of mortals? Our question then is, what was God so scared of? Having made men and women out of love, didn't his vision for them include being able to judge between right and wrong? Isn't that, as I tried to explain to Latoyah, exactly what being human is about: not just the tilling of the earth and the naming of animals but the infinitely more difficult process of making decisions to ensure we balance our needs and our resources; coping with greed, disaster and failure as well as growth, productivity and the nurture of renewables?

So what is the story teller telling us when he says, *for in the day that you shall eat it, you shall die?* Surely all that dies is a shallow innocence which none of us wants anyway?

Suddenly we see God as we (as parents) often see ourselves, so loving and caring that we want to protect our children from the pains of the world they are living in. Sadly it can only last for a short while before the mirage is broken and reality breaks through. How painful that is for both child and parent; the moment when our children realise the sickening truths about the inequalities and root sinfulness of our world.

That same theme is picked up in the very last line of this reading: *and the man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed.* It is the vision of an idyllic natural openness which the writer of this part of Genesis holds before us for just a moment: that time when human beings were entirely open to one another - without fear, without lust, without envy or mistrust. In such a place there was no reason for shame.

The tragedy of all this is that our earliest ancestors enjoyed these wonderful gifts – up to the moment when they took on moral and ethical judgement. At that moment their idyll died.

We sometimes call this event 'The Fall', the fall from grace. Our art galleries are full of depictions of Eve holding the apple, the lines of branches and undergrowth hiding the nakedness which now can no longer be viewed with the same innocent enjoyment.

But was the price for that worth paying? Wasn't it right for us to have the skills to be able to weigh the issues before us?

Back in the art gallery we go to another room and turn to the scenes of Calvary and to the crucified Lord. Into that horrendous scene of pain and suffering is the Son of Man, the new Adam, set not in a Garden but in an urban refuse dump.

There, for very proper reasons, Jesus is painted with a loin cloth but we know the reality. To the immense shame of the condemned, they were stripped of everything they wore, for the mockery of the crowd.

Ecce Homo: this is our God. This is the God who stood us in Eden so that we could be without shame, innocent and free. Since the Fall, the Tower of Babel and every sinful event ever since, Jesus is nailed to the Cross in exactly the same naked condition – both totally innocent but also supremely morally and ethically aware. This is Calvary: this is the making of a complete at-one-ment/Atonement: he for us, he with his father. In other words, the choice that we humans face – of innocent naivety or fallen moralists – is made possible, but only in the person of Jesus.

And in that way he is the one who not only makes sense of Creation as it is (that is, as Genesis describes it) but the one who shows us how Creation will one day be – where there is no shame left but where we will also be fully aware of what it is we are doing.

The truth is that, in Jesus, it is not us who die, but God himself: he it was who chose to die so that we might be forgiven and be restored. We can't read these verses of Genesis without looking at Jesus and looking at him whom they pierced - on another tree, and in another place.