

<b>Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 Grahamstown Cathedral 7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent Year A</b>
Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7	Psalm 32	Romans 5:12-19
		Matthew 4:1-11
<b>OUR WORLD IS BROKEN...WHAT? HOW? WHO?</b>		

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.” (Matt 4:1-2)

### **ASH WEDNESDAY & LENT**

In the opening words of our Gospel reading, we are given the traditional picture of the season of Lent: the wilderness experience, facing the darkness around us and within us; forty days and nights – marking a profound time of transition, signifying that something new will emerge at the end of it all.

On Ash Wednesday, we received the ash cross on our foreheads, a mark or sign of repentance: the ancient symbol of desolation and grief, and penitence. Lent began with us acknowledging that we need to repent - to change our lives. “The world is a mess. We are a mess.”<sup>1</sup> We are in profound need of God’s mercy and grace. And so... three questions: What? How? Who?

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<sup>1</sup> Rev Tracy Bell, 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020

## WHAT? WHAT HAS GONE WRONG?

Last night I drove back from the CSM camp, listening to the news on the radio. It was profoundly depressing. There was the acknowledgement that the killer of 8-year-old Tazne van Wyk should not have been out on parole. Our justice and correctional service systems seem to be failing us, very badly indeed. When terrible things happen, we look for someone to blame, someone to give account; but more deeply we rage at what has gone wrong. What is happening? What has gone wrong?

The other news item was a call for communities to protect their schools, and for an end to violence at schools. Teachers being assaulted. Pupils assaulting one another. Extreme bullying. Stabbing. Fights. What is happening? What has gone wrong?

Then add to these events, the picture of ongoing issues at Fort England as reported in Friday's *Grocotts*<sup>2</sup>; our municipality's struggles; ESKOM and PRASA and SAA, with years of looting and bad management coming home to roost. What is happening? What has gone wrong?

We enter into Lent, because as much as we cry out and rage at the evil that is all around us, you and I have a part to play in it all. We are part of the problem. And during these forty days we open our hearts to God so that the change, the transformation, can begin with us. With you and me. So that we can begin to be part of the answer.

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<sup>2</sup> *Grocotts*, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020

The answers in all these cases are complex, linked to our violent history, family breakdown, alcohol abuse, inequalities in society, greed, cruelty, abuse of power. But there is a deeper answer which embraces all these.

## **Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

...gives us the answer: that at the heart of all our broken relationships, conflict, suffering, is humankind's broken relationship with God.

### **2:15-17 - innocence**

In the beginning, all is good. Man and woman – representing all humans - are in the garden, the place of harmony with God and one another. They are in a state of innocence. They are given work – to care for and enjoy the garden. Work itself is not evil. In the garden is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “to know” is to experience in any way: so to have knowledge of evil is to experience evil. Eat of any tree – enjoy everything; but not that tree, for then you will die.

### **3:1-7 - fall**

The snake is a creature of God. It represents the power hostile to humankind. The potential for evil, the seed of rebellion is there in the beginning. It is one of the complexities we live with: in a perfect world, how is there room for evil? How can an all-powerful God allow the

serpent to undermine his will? We live with these questions.

The serpent questions what God has said; the woman eats of the fruit, and gives to the man; “then their eyes were opened and they realised that they were naked...” What follows is increasing separation between humankind and God, and a series of catastrophes that are the consequences of their sins.

The story of all men and women... given to us in the story of a single man and a single woman... how they dropped the ball badly... but in reality it is all of us, all of humankind, that has dropped the ball badly....“one man is represented doing what many men did...” Instead of becoming free, man became a slave – “of his desires, his passions, of work, of pain and ultimately of death.”<sup>3</sup>

## **WHO? WHO WILL SORT IT OUT?**

### **Romans 5:12-19**

“... sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned...” (Rom 5:12)...The answer, God’s answer, is the second Adam, Jesus Christ, whose act of righteousness “leads to justification and life for all” (Rom 5:18). We are not trapped forever. There is a way back to the garden, back into relationship with God, and the healing of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Kasper, W 2019. *A Path into Life. Reflections for Lent and Easter*, 7.

# HOW? HOW DO WE FIND THE WAY?

## Matthew 4:1-11

In contrast to Adam, Jesus shows us life's true direction.

The three temptations: "If you are God's son, command these stones to become bread." The temptation of possessions, of consumerism, of having more and more, drugs and sensation and intoxication...the more you have, the happier you will be. But the end is emptiness. "the longing of our hearts is greater than every earthly reality."<sup>4</sup> We are to live on the bread, the Word of life, that shows us the path of life. God alone fills our emptiness.

The second temptation: "If you are God's son, throw yourself down, for God's angels will carry you." The temptation "to make a big show of our life, a spectacle, to look beautiful, to be noticed, to receive applause, to collect honours, fame..."<sup>5</sup> We see this when rulers and leaders are arrogant, drawing attention to themselves.

But one day we fall. "The arrogant person's fall can be very far and painful." "Don't put the Lord your God to the test."

The third temptation. "All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me" – the temptation of power, of superiority, of controlling the lives of others, being

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<sup>4</sup> Kasper, 8

<sup>5</sup> Kasper, 8-9

successful at any price; oppressing or humiliating others. Instead, we are to worship God alone.

The decision and choice we face: will our lives revolve around our egos; our possessions, our status, our power – the path of death; or to allow God and God’s will to rule and guide what we do – to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour.

## **CONCLUSION**

The world is a mess. We are a mess. Let’s acknowledge that. It’s a good place to begin – to acknowledge our need of God.

Temptations come to us in various forms. Let’s use this Lent to do some honest self-reflection; and to choose life.

God gives us the grace when we ask.

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Dean of Grahamstown  
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