

Sermon for Sunday 26 February 2023 – The First Sunday of Lent

Revd Graham Naylor, Curate

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-19; Matthew 4.1-11

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please do be seated.

So a couple of weeks ago we had the account in our Old Testament reading of creation. Here today, we have the next instalment in our Old Testament reading of that good creation being broken where humankind was intended to be the image of God and that image became broken.

It would be very easy today with all the great passages of scripture - it's almost if we put a bit of the creation on the front end, we've got creation **for** Israel, Jesus and the remaking of creation. It's almost today - the lectionary readers have done a great job for a change - it's almost the Gospel in a nutshell and we could just read those and say no more, which some of you are probably saying, that'd be great, let's carry on with the rest of the service and stop here. Not going to let you get away with that.

But we have this fallen creation and God calls Israel to be his people and to be the image of God that the people of God were meant to be. They were to be God's representatives. God takes them out of slavery in Egypt and he takes them into the wilderness to be tested. 40 years they're in the wilderness. This was their preparation to be the people of God.

An illustration: in my life, I still do it, not as well as I used to, but in my younger days I used to do quite a lot of rock climbing. Unfortunately, the years have put on weight and I'm way above my - jockey's talk about being their riding weight, I talk about being my climbing weight - and I'm a little bit over it at the moment. But one of the things that we used to do with climbing when we had new climbers and I was doing it in scouting, so when we had the county climbing team, we would take young scouts and the first thing we would do is put them in a harness, put a rope on them and a helmet (if we remembered - the days before health and safety, it was great); and we would get them to let go of the rock face.

We just get them climbing up this high and say, let go, and test that the person who's belaying you is going to hold you. Does that make sense? We would get them to try it out in a controlled situation before the occasion when they're 80ft up in the air or further and they peeled off the rock face and they needed to know that the person that was holding the rope on the other end would hold them.

It was a testing for them, but it was also a testing of the person belaying. And on one occasion I was doing an exam for somebody in there climbing and I went up about 20ft and I warned them I was going to let go and I let go and they didn't hold me. That was an interesting moment, but it's this sense of testing and proving to be able to have confidence in; you with me? So Israel was taken into the deserts and they were tested as the people of God; they failed miserably and subsequently, when they went into the Promised Land, time and time again, they failed miserably as the people of God.

If we hadn't had Psalm 32 today, we could have had Psalm 78. It's well worth having a read. This is just part of it - 'In the sight of their ancestors, he (that's God) worked marvels in the land of Egypt. He divided the sea and let them pass through us and made the water stand like a heap, and in the daytime he led them with a cloud and night long with a fiery light. He split rocks open in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock and cause waters to flow down like rivers.' And you would think that the people of God would go, we need to do what God wants us to do. All this he's done for us, it's great. We're the people of God. Did they? Sorry, you can talk back to me. Did they? No.

This is what they did. According to the Psalmist, they sinned still more against Him, rebelling against the most high in the desert. They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying, can God spread a table in the wilderness even though he struck the rock so that water gushed out and the torrents overflowed? Can he also give bread or provide meat to his people? This was against God, who they had seen bring them out of slavery in Egypt. They'd seen the waters part. They'd seen Pharaoh's army drowned in the waters. They'd seen manna. So they failed. So God intervenes himself, and in the person of Jesus Christ he came. Colossians tells us, a prewriter to the Colossians says that '**He** was the image of the invisible God.' And we've just read of **his** testing, **his** proving as to whether he could be the true Israelite that Israel failed to be.

And through that testing; and this isn't a doctrine class, we won't go into it today; but there are so many echoes of what Israel were tested with and failed over 40 years, paralleling Jesus' testing. And notice I'm using this word, testing and not temptation. Temptation - the the idea of me coming up to you during Lent and you've given up chocolate biscuits and I come with a plate of chocolate biscuits and tempt you to take them, it doesn't have that meaning. It's a testing. It's approving. And Jesus, where Israel failed, succeeded.

You could maybe look at the parallels between the testing of Jesus and the testing of the Israelites, as it's summarised in Deuteronomy, chapter six to chapter eight, where they were tested to believe that God could provide for them, that God could protect them, and also were challenged. And I'm going to add a third P, god's priority, that he was the only one to be worshipped, God's provision, God's protection, God's priority; and Jesus succeeded, and because of this, Paul can say that because of Jesus' obedience in his testing and in the testing of the cross, that he's able to deal with this issue of sin, this broken world, this broken image of God that we see all around us even now in humankind. Paul uses complex language; and again, it's a justification, and this isn't a doctrine class this morning, so we're not going to go back and look at the Council of Trent in 1547, where Luther looked at justification and justification of righteousness, justification of faith and assurance of salvation. We'll maybe do that at 'Think and Drink'.

But whatever that language of justification and righteousness means, it means that we can have a relationship with God because of what Jesus has done. That's good news this morning, because God did for Israel and has done for us, what Israel couldn't do. And soon we'll come to Eucharist and we will

remember that. That God in Jesus, dying on the cross, did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. And we will come with thanksgiving.

Amen.