

Followers of the Way Redeemer in a broken world

Preacher: Lynda Rose

Genesis 3:1-7 Mark 16:1-7

Usually, on Easter Sunday, the readings are Resurrection readings – and they are glorious. The earthquake and the empty tomb ... the angel, ‘He is not here, He has been raised’. Jesus appearing to Mary in the garden (John 20:15ff) ... And of course, this is what Easter is all about – because if Jesus had only been crucified, end of story, what would be the point? Who needs a dead Messiah? Someone to show us how to behave...? Not really.

No, our faith is in the *risen* Lord, who suffered and died in order to break Satan’s hold, because humanity had been in bondage to the devil - to evil - from the moment first Eve, and then Adam, succumbed to the lures of the snake in Eden, as we heard in our first reading.

‘Did God really say you mustn’t eat from that tree ...? Really!’ And then, ‘You’re not going to die! God’s only saying that because He knows that as soon as you eat it, you’ll become like Him. You’ll know good and evil’ (Genesis 3:4-5). Well, okay, slightly paraphrased, but you get the general idea. ‘Eat the fruit and you won’t need God anymore. You’ll be gods yourselves!’

Now at one level, of course, you could say that the snake was being brutally honest. Once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they really would know good from evil. But what he didn’t tell them was that from that point on they’d be under his power and they wouldn’t be able to break free. The real truth – and Satan’s a master at giving us half-truths that distort the facts – the real truth was that the knowledge they’d get would place them under subjection, so that far from getting control, they’d be the ones being controlled ... with the result that they really would die to everything they’d been before, and to the relationship with God for which they’d been created. And we’ve been in that condition – that state of death – ever since. By ourselves there was, and is, absolutely nothing we can do to break free.

But we know from Scripture that, from that moment Adam and Eve fell, God began to plan to win humanity back. He knew we couldn’t do it by ourselves, because we’d come under bondage. Sure, we could try to lead ‘good lives’ and be obedient – and God gave us rules to help – but there was no way by ourselves that we could ever break free. So that was why, in time, God sent His own Son, to take on human flesh and do battle face-to-face with the devil. Jesus was born in order to break Satan’s hold and restore us to relationship with God ... to the Kingdom of heaven. And by His victory, He opened the way for the Spirit to come and indwell within us ... strengthening, guiding ... teaching us. Fitting us for heaven. This is Christ’s gift, when we repent and renounce evil, bringing

us under the lordship and protection of God Almighty. This is the way we are supposed to live. And when we live in God's power, there's nothing and no one that can stand against us, without His permission ... and only those things that help are allowed.

Can you even begin to imagine the sheer cost involved in achieving that victory? The planning and the difficulty? I have to be honest, I can't. Not looked at objectively. But I do know the reality of what God has done, in my life and the lives of others. I'm free because Jesus fought that battle on my behalf. And that's not just some kind of nice, neat metaphor for spiritual liberation. Christ has literally rescued me – and you, when you accept His lordship – from the grip of Satan. He sets us free, and brings us back into that relationship with God for which we were created. And, because of that, I know that God's never going to give up on me or abandon me. Wow!

But over the last century we've seen evil once again battling to assert control, and really it's been extraordinarily successful. As we've advanced in knowledge, and got more, as we think, 'sophisticated', men and women have listened and given in to that age-old temptation – you don't need God anymore. You've grown up. You can do what you want, have what you want ... who needs some woolly-haired fairy in the sky?

But the outcome of giving way to that temptation, just like in Eden, is still 'death'.

All around, in the world today, we see growing darkness: the pandemic still rumbling along, despite our best efforts to pretend it's not there; families breaking down and mass loneliness; violence and war in Ukraine, that could easily spill out across Europe ... across the world; global financial markets reportedly near to collapse; food shortages, with the possibility of famine; climate change.... The list goes on and on.

But, to a world that's largely rejected God, what does salvation look like? Freedom to be who we are, without feeling frightened or ashamed? That's what certain activists would probably say. But the ordinary man and woman in the street would probably be a bit more down to earth – no financial worries, they might say, with enough money for food, clothing and the occasional break away? The chance to meet up and relax with friends, without having to obey Covid restrictions...? No pandemic, no conflict and violence ... no war!

While we persist in giving allegiance to evil – making a god of 'Self' – true freedom, fulfilment, and life in its fullness is impossible.

The truth is that Christ, by His death on the Cross, broke Satan's hold - but the vast majority of men and women today have chosen darkness over light, preferring the illusion of self-determination, power and control, over obedience to God – which actually is the only thing that sets us free. And because of our rebellion, God has withdrawn His protection - our bulwark against evil - and is allowing us to inherit the consequences of our choice.

What we are experiencing is not in itself judgment, though some call it so, but rather it is a foretaste of the judgment that is to come, when Christ returns in glory to deal finally and forever with Satan. While men and women persist in rebellion, there is literally no hope of salvation. We cannot solve the problems, no matter how clever we think we are,

and unless we repent, there is infinitely worse to come. In this life, and in the world to come.

The message this Easter is to return to Christ. This is our only hope of salvation, and the message that every man, woman and child on the planet needs to hear. They need to know how it is they've gone so badly astray and why their lives are such a mess. They need to know why their families have broken down, why they haven't been able to find love and enjoy a lasting relationship. They need to know why there's so much violence on our streets and between the nations.

The tinpot gods of Self cannot deliver us from suffering and death Only Christ can. And that is our commission, while we remain in this life. To shine God's light into this dark world and tell others of the wonder of what Christ has done ... and can still do for men and women today.