

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
2nd Sunday before Lent

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25; Revelation 4; Luke 8.22-25

'put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it'

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Stories are an important part of who we are. They have helped humanity define itself for millennia. Through stories humanity has explored its relationship to itself, to the world around it and to its gods. For us and for our faith this is no less true. We have a book full of stories that explore the relationship between humanity and YHWH God. When we stop and think about them, when we reflect on what they are saying we can begin to understand our own stories and our relationship to God and the world around us.

Our first reading is known as the second creation story, the first having been relayed in Genesis 1, and is a story that explores the beginnings of humanity and what our relationship to God and creation might be. It is a story rooted in a people that are becoming more established and settled; moving from a nomadic existence to one of a settled farming life. In this transition is a need to re-understand the relationship between humanity and nature and how God has set us together. As we become settled and begin to see a need to control nature how do we understand this alongside our relationship to and with God? In this story God sets us up as farmers, as tenders of the garden. Our connection with the natural world becomes one of dominance and control rather than the co-existence and sharing of the first creation narrative. Creation now becomes something to control, to subdue, to dominate, to be used for our benefit, a tool for survival.

This view could be said to be divinely sanctioned. In Genesis 2 the man is put in a garden to tend it and till it, with God's blessing. Woman is created as a companion to man...but that's for another sermon. In the gospel passage today, we have Jesus subduing the uncontrollable elements of nature, proving himself Lord of all. If we then are his disciples, we can also subdue creation, bending it to our will for the good of God's mission and ministry; the good of God's people.

What then about our place in and responsibility for creation, this a gift from God. Is this relationship, this story about the control and use; the taming of nature for our purpose; or is it something else? What is our story of our relationship to creation and our God for today?

This was an unexpected question that arose during my study leave last autumn. How does our relationship to and place within the created order reflect something of our understanding of ourselves and our relationship to and with God today? What is our story?

It is argued by some that the story we now have of our relationship to and place within the created order has become an abusive one, rooted in a Christian theology of dominance and use, a theology that has passed its purpose. I would suggest that this interpretation of our relationship with creation is much older than Christianity and begins with a story of humanity that sees a transition taking place, a transformation of people that needs to be understood. The more important question is what is that story today? Are we in a time to re-assess and re-explore our relationship to this great gift of creation; to understand our place and responsibility, to re-read our creation neighbours and re-evaluate how we stand together? In so doing how are we to re-understand our relationship to and with God in the context of our twenty-first century world?

The Indigenous Peoples of North America have a view that humanity is part of and not dominant over creation. That in our engagement with our fellow creatures we have a responsibility towards each other; for our welfare and care, to understand ourselves as part of and engaged with nature rather than standing apart from and overbearing nature. Such a view, though ancient gives Western theologians a new perspective and a new understanding of our relationship to the world around us. It encourages us to re-assess our interpretation of our stories and see afresh our relationship with God in the context of the created order. In Genesis then, the gardener Adam is not there now to subdue and use nature. Now he shares in the work of nature to creating a place for all to co-exist in harmony. Together the world is made habitable. The Eden idyll becomes a heaven on earth. Our understanding of

our relationship with creation changes and our relationship with Creator God shifts. The second creation story comes into harmony with the first.

With the glimmers of sunshine; as we emerge from the dark days of winter our thoughts turn to new creation and the joys of spring. So too must our thoughts of our responsibility and place within God's creation and our relationship to the Creator. As questions arise over the industrial nature of modern farming, the need to feed an ever-increasing population and the call for cheap food so we, as people of faith should strive to find answers in the context of our faith and our relationship to God. Jesus says to us 'where is your faith?'. The decisions we make day by day require us to have that question to the fore. As people of faith we should re-tell our story seeing the world afresh and to redress our place within creation to lead to heaven on earth.