

A Lent 1

4<sup>th</sup> March 17

Place: St Mary's

Gen 2.17-17, 3.1-7

Theme: What is Sin?

- ◆ Joke about girl confessing to sin of Vanity.  
Forgive me father for I have sinned, every day I look and the mirror and see that I get prettier and prettier 'That's not a sin, that's just a mistake.'
- ◆ This morning I want to talk about sin, because I think that it is something that is quite tricky to understand. People mean all sorts of things when they talk about sin, but I want to focus today on what our three readings this morning tell us about sin. It is the first Sunday of Lent and it is good to begin Lent by thinking about what sin is, what we need to repent of and why God needed to send Jesus Christ to save us.
- ◆ In Chapter 5 of Romans Paul contrasts the disobedience of Adam with the obedience of Jesus Christ. Paul's language of obedience and disobedience is uncongenial to us. Few of us like to be told what to do. Most of us think that we know best. We are also aware that just following orders was not an adequate defence at the Nurenburg trials and is not now. Obedience to the wrong people can lead to great evil
- ◆ Paul himself uses more than one metaphor to explore the mystery of sin. He also talks about the slavery of sin and sin being falling wide of the mark, or failing to fully reflect the image of God. Jesus in his teaching makes it clear that sin

is more than just breaking the ten commandments. A couple of weeks ago we heard Jesus saying feeling lust or anger towards someone was as bad as committing adultery and murder in the Gospel. Again we see that sin is more than disobedient acts.

- ◆ If we go back to the story of the fall, which Paul is reflecting on in Chapter 5 of Romans, we see that Eve's disobedience is grounded in three things. The first is simple appetite, 'she saw that the tree was good for food,' the second is that she desired to be wise. Thirdly she does not take God's warning seriously. The serpent encourages her not to believe what God has told her and Adam and instead suggests to her that God has been lying to her.
- ◆ Eve is very foolish in her judgement that the snake is more to be trusted than God. This suggests that part of what the story is about is wanting the right thing but getting it in the wrong way. Interestingly this is echoed in the temptations of Jesus. Each of the temptations is a corruption of his ministry. The temptation to turn the stones to bread is a corrupt version of the miracles of multiplication where he feeds thousands with a few loaves and fish. The temptation to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple reminds us of his acts of power, stilling the storm or walking on water. The final temptation is also a travesty of his ministry. He

is tempted to worship the devil, to put something other than God at the centre of his ministry and his life. The devil tempts him to pursue power so that every knee will bow to him. The irony is that instead of finding worldly power his obedience to God takes him to the cross; which seems a place of absolute powerlessness. All eyes see him nailed naked to the cross to suffer and die. Yet John especially sees the cross as not a humiliation but Jesus' glorification. After the resurrection we realise that through it Jesus becomes the Lord of heaven and earth.

- ◆ The difference between what Jesus does and what the devil tempts him to do is that the Devil is tempting him to follow his own agenda to get wealth, power and fame. When Jesus's ministry echos the temptations Devil suggests what makes what he does different is that he acts to serve and call people to God's Kingdom not to create his own kingdom. Jesus is able to resist the Devil and be obedient to God because he trusts absolutely in God and his goodness.
- ◆ This helps us to understand what repentance is. Repentance is not so much feeling guilty or embarrassed, although it may lead to it. Repentance literally means turning around. For Christians repentance means putting God rather than ourselves at the centre of our lives. It means trusting in the goodness and wisdom of God rather than thinking we know best.

- ◆ We needed Jesus to come and call us to repentance because we cannot find the way on our own. We are blind to reality, we know something of what is good. We want to be wise, but we are not able to recognise that the snake is lying to us and not God. One of the most common healing miracles in the Gospels is the healing of the blind. This is not just because blindness is a terrible affliction, but because all of us are blind. All of us mistake what matters, what God is, what is true and what is false. This is both the fruit and the cause of the fall.
- ◆ God needed to send Jesus because just like a blind person we can only find our way by following him. We cannot see the way on our own. Once we accept that, once we start to trust him and allow him to teach and lead us we will discover that God has in store for us more than we can either hope or dream on our own.