

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

The story of the Old Testament is a repeating story. It tells of God's goodness and love and generosity, of humankind's disobedience, of God's anger and frustration, his eventual forgiveness and then a new covenant, more signs of God's love and goodness.

It begins in the book of Genesis as God is described gently moulding the earth to make Adam, breathing life into this figure. Lovingly setting humanity free, trusting that humanity will know and understand the limits of its power. But the story tells of disobedience, of testing the boundaries, banishment shortly followed by sibling rivalry and murder.

In the time of Noah, God made a new promise, but within weeks of the flood receding, those rescued were falling away. In Exodus we have the story of Moses who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and the new covenant, the law. How often they turned away, complained, followed other Gods. More broken promises.

Then came the prophets, and once more the people turned away, forgot their side of the bargain. The strong failed to look after the weak, many got rich or powerful by exploiting others. The priests got lazy and corrupt. And so throughout all the books of the Old Testament it seems a repeated cycle of faith, trust and betrayal is played and replayed.

Until that day when the final card is played, and God sends Jesus to be born as human child, born in a country ruled by occupying forces, where murder, even of children, was not uncommon. Is this the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy:

The LORD said: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

But we know that the world is still full of sin and hatred. Do we all know the Lord, from the least to the greatest? What is different?

To understand that we have to turn to Jesus.

Jesus said:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Jesus is that grain of wheat, a seed that has fallen into the ground. His life on earth was just the beginning, but through his death a precious seed was planted, given to us to nurture.

Once more God takes us to the Garden. Once more he trusts us with his creation. Once more he shows us the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Once more he breathes new life into us. We are indeed the followers of a new Adam.

And we look around at this new Eden and it is no paradise. We see the wars, we see the exploitation of the weak, we see starvation and poverty, we see the zealots so certain that they are right, we see Christians focussing all their time on legal issues - who is allowed to do what and to whom - we see this mess and are tempted to throw up our hands in horror.

But in this Garden is the seed that has been planted and we have been trusted with its care, to water it with the water of life, to nurture with the love of Christ, to forgive and create communion. Such a small and fragile seed it seems against this background of greed and corruption and quest for power. But the seed will never lose its potential to grow.

We have been given all we need, we have the pattern of Christ, we have the help of the Spirit, we have the grace and forgiveness of God. No-one need feel forsaken, no one need thirst, no one is beyond forgiveness, all are related, one family, all can be in paradise. Despite all that has been, and all that is, God trusts us once more.

He trusts us to follow the example of Christ. We have the words of Jesus as our guide:

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

Hating this life does not mean being miserable, sitting there wanting to die. It means not dwelling upon ourselves, what we have or haven't got, how lucky or unlucky we are. Instead we should be full of gratitude for what we do have, full of compassion for others, caring far more about the needs of others than about ourselves.

God trusts us to care for this world, all the plants and animals and people. He trusts us to do his will. This is the amazing generosity of God. And if we keep his commandments, the commandment to love, we will find ourselves in Paradise.