

Disastrous News

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] St. John's Shaughnessy Church If you would open up your Bibles please to Genesis chapter 2.

This is the second in the series of 6. Genesis 2, let's look at verse 8 to begin with. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Now to the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Verse 15. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, part of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

You shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die. Verse 25. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

[1 : 31] Last week we began the series, and we began at the place, the Bible and all the Christian creeds begin, with the fact that everything that exists has been made by God.

God is our personal creator, and he's made us for himself, and therefore our lives and the world in which we live has meaning and purpose. And we saw that creation is good, that God has not retired to some corner of the universe and just let us roll on, but he is actively engaged, sustaining and nurturing, which means that every living thing and everything that exists depends on God for its existence.

We saw that we as human beings are created, so we are part of creation, but we're also unique, made in the image of God, to represent God to his world.

And if you look at your picture on the front of the bulletin, the first diagram, that little box, represents that. The crown is God, of course, the world is the circle, and we are made under the rule of God, to represent him, to care for his world, under his authority.

But as we turn to Genesis 2, the camera angle shifts slightly, and we find out that creation is all about relationships. And the picture in Genesis 2 is that God has created us in three primary relationships.

[3 : 07] He's created us in relation to himself. And so we find in Genesis 2, the man and the woman walking and speaking with God, in communion and fellowship with God.

Not a fellowship of equals. God is still God. And yet there is joy and friendship and freedom between them. And the first word that God speaks, and people usually get this wrong, the first word God speaks is permission.

Eat of everything he says. But after he gives his permission, then he gives a word of prohibition. You shall not eat at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is a symbol for who is going to decide what is right and wrong.

The second relation we are created in, of course, is relationship with each other. If you read through the story, seven times in chapter one, we hear that creation is good, good, good, good.

Good, excellently good. But then in chapter two, verse 18, the first negative note is struck.

Something is not good. It is not good for man to be alone.

[4 : 15] We don't do well alone. Loneliness hurts. Adam is incomplete by himself. He needs another human person. And so God creates Eve.

And there is this overwhelming and overflowing delight in the chapter. Have you ever noticed in verse 23, it's a poem. And it's meant to be sung as Adam and Eve dance around and enjoy one another.

Created in relation to God, each other, and with creation. And the word the Bible uses here is dominion. To care for, till, and keep the garden. To be a reflection of God to his world.

And all these relationships are marked by love, respect, security, transparency, vulnerability with God, between the man and the woman, and with creation.

This is life as God intended it. And although we catch glimpses of this still, we know that we don't experience life in this way now.

[5 : 20] And that's why I've called today Disastrous News. And it is the second foundation of the Christian faith. And it's so important that it begins in chapter 3 of Genesis, which is the very second page of the Bible.

And it indicates to us how sin entered our world and how sin entered our lives. And I know as soon as I say the word sin, half of you have said, we don't talk about sin.

At least we don't like to talk about sin. And I think the reason is because we've given this idea of sin a bit of a makeover. Sin is now roughly equivalent to anything that is fun or fattening.

I don't know how many restaurants I've been to. When it comes to the dessert menu, the dessert I really want is usually called something like chocolate sin cake. Well, sin is also sometimes thought of as sex or breaking the rules or making mistakes.

But I want to say the Bible's view of sin is unique. No other philosophy, no other religion in the world reveals the human condition as the Bible does. And it teaches fundamentally three things about sin.

[6 : 36] The first is that sin is anti-creation. Sin is the reversal, the turning over, the inversion, the undoing of creation.

So if you cast your eyes down to chapter 3, we begin in verse 1 with the serpent. Here is a creature who is meant to be under the dominion of Adam and Eve.

And he simply asks a question. He says, Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree of the garden? Now it's a very slippery question.

Because that's not really what God said. And what the serpent, who is Satan, is trying to do is he's putting a spin on God's word and he's suggesting, Perhaps God is not really interested in your good and in your best.

Perhaps he is a spoil sport. I mean, why should you accept any limitation at all? Why should you be restricted by what he says? And when Eve answers, she's beginning to be drawn in and she says to the serpent, Well, we can eat of any tree, but there's one tree we can't eat or even touch.

[7 : 53] Which is again not what God said. And now Satan openly contradicts God's word. And you can hear his sneer. He says, Don't be ridiculous.

You won't die. Do you think that God has gone to all this trouble to make you and suddenly will take it around, take it away from you? I mean, look around you. Everything is good.

He just does not have it in him to do something like that. And then we read in verse 6 these tragic words. She took it and ate it and so did her husband.

And in so doing, they overturn and reverse creation. Instead of hearing God's word and obeying and exercising God's rule over creation, they listen to the word of the creature and turn away from obeying the creator.

And in doing that, they turn creation upside down. And the consequence is that each of those three relationships is now changed forever.

[9 : 02] As soon as disobedience enters the creation, the beauty and the harmony of the creation is shattered. The transparency and the openness is lost in the relationships.

Now, instead of there being natural kindness and openness between one another, we are threatened to one another. We're afraid of each other. Because the only true basis of unity between us as human beings is God the creator.

If I turn aside from him, well, that completely threatens any chance of unity. If I'm trying to be God and you're trying to be God, you're my rival.

And that is why man and woman cover themselves in aprons of fig leaves. It's their way of pretending everything is fine, protecting themselves and pretending they're still okay.

But they're not. As soon as the disobedience happens, there is awkwardness and nervousness and fear and mistrust. They are ashamed and they feel guilty with one another.

[10 : 06] And so, they cover themselves with fig leaves and we've been doing the same ever since. And when God comes walking in the garden, their first response isn't to go out and say, this is a great garden.

Thank you. Let's walk this way. Nope. It's fear and shame. And I think most pathetic of all, the man and the woman play the victim.

The man blames the woman. The woman blames the snake. And the man even insinuates that God is to blame. He says, the woman you gave me, she did this.

It's her fault. which is something men do. It's a brilliant expose, isn't it, of how sin works.

Of how the effect of sin is the effect of denying my responsibility for sin. One of the most awful films I've ever seen is a film called Bean.

[11:08] It stars Mr Bean, Rowan Atkinson. And he's hired to guard a famous painting called Whistler's Mother, a priceless treasure of American art.

And when he's alone with the painting, he sneezes on it and takes a rag and starts scrubbing and completely ruins the painting.

And in a sense, that's what sin has done. It's come into God's creation and it's ruined it. But it's ruined it in a specific way. It's not just a surface issue.

It's ruined and defaced to the very depths of who we are. So, instead of being marked by harmony and love, our relationship with God and one another is marked by fear and guilt.

And commentator after commentator and expert after expert is at a failure, is at a loss to tell us why there's so much exploitation, why there is so much conflict and fear and insecurity and disintegration and ecological crisis in the world.

[12:14] And the Bible says, very simply, it is because we have turned aside from God as our creator. It's no longer a natural thing to believe what he says or to obey what he says.

We are afraid of one another and we cannot care for our world because we have reversed creation. And while Adam and Eve opened the door, every single one of us have followed them through.

The New Testament says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. We certainly deceive, we certainly don't deceive those around us. If we say we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

So firstly then, sin is anti-creation. But secondly, and most importantly, sin is anti-God. Sin is not just a horizontal issue between us, it is a vertical issue.

The essence of sin is that it is directed against God as our creator. You can't understand sin unless you have a personal creator. Sin is rebelling against God as our maker.

[13:27] You see, the idea that God, the idea of creation is not that just there's a God up there somewhere who made everything. The idea of creation is that that God made me and owns me and you.

He is your God and my God. And therefore, he has purposes for us. And when we turn aside from him and when we disobey him, we say to him, you don't own me.

You don't have any right to tell me what to do. I know what's best. Thank you very much. You are not my creator. I will be my creator. It is a pathetic delusion that comes over us.

But at root, it is the rejection of God as the maker and ruler and lord of us all. That is why the Bible makes such a difference between sin and sins.

If sins are the symptoms, sin is the disease. And the focus of the Bible is not so much on the individual symptoms but on the disease itself that gives rise to the symptoms.

[14:35] And unless we get the diagnosis right, we'll never come close to dealing with the real problem. I've said this before. here at St. John's as a child growing up in Africa, I contracted polio.

And the doctors wrongly diagnosed me as having malaria. So they pumped me full of malaria drugs. And I nearly died from polio. And you should know that I'm wonderfully resistant to every kind of malaria.

Always have been. It wasn't the problem. I still bear the aftermath of polio. You see, if you listen to our culture, the culture says that the real problem is crime.

We need more police. The real problem is broken families. We need more counselling. The real problem is ignorance. We need more education. The real problem is society. We need to go to Australia.

And we do. You do need the police. I think the most superficial diagnosis I have read recently is the idea that we're out of balance and we need balance.

[15:47] But you see, God's word tells us that our deepest issue is that we have rejected God as creator. And we've said, you do not have any right to tell us what to do.

And we stand before him guilty. And I'm aware how difficult it is to hear this, particularly in our culture. We are a culture that is addicted to flattery.

The commitment of our culture and the message of our culture is to boost us and to bolster us and to compliment us and to cover us with the happy, friendly, jolly logos.

And Jesus comes to us and he says, you have a disease at the core of who you are. And unless you recognise how sick you are, you will never be healed.

See, that's why the Bible defines sin in this way. In 1 John it says, everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

[16:49] It's very important. Sin is not my breaking the law. Sin is my making the law.

It's me saying, I am outside your law. I am going to make my own. I am going to pretend to decide what is right and wrong.

I am going to decide what is good and evil. You see, it's not just disobeying rules. Sin is a false faith in myself.

It is the delusion that I have the right to act as God that I make the rules. Do you not find it appallingly arrogant when people say things like this, when it comes my turn to face God, I am going to give him a piece of my mind.

I have got questions for him that will put him on the back foot that's going to take him a long time to answer. The Bible says, no one is righteous.

[17:53] No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have gone wrong. No one does good.

Not even one. Good in this sense of obeying the creator. The true measuring stick for our lives is not my opinion or your opinion or the opinion of the majority but the perfection of God, our creator. And when we stand before God to give an account of our lives, the Bible says we will have nothing to say that every mouth will be stopped before him.

And that the question is not so much how can God condemn anyone but how can God save anyone? The remarkable and wonderful and stunning news of the scriptures is that even though we turn aside from God, God continues to love us and continues to bless us, continues to give himself to us and even when we have disobeyed and even when we have created a mess for ourselves, he sends his one and only son to be a new Adam, to live for us and to die for us and he promises us that through faith in that Lord Jesus Christ he will heal us and forgive us from the disease that would lead to death itself.

Sin is anti-creation, sin is anti-God and thirdly and finally sin is anti-human. What I mean by that is this, we live outside the garden and we live in a different relationship with creator and one another in creation.

[19:42] That act in the garden has changed our human nature. What it means is sin is no longer external to us, sin is now within our nature.

One of the most persistent delusions throughout history is that human beings are fundamentally good or at least morally neutral. Despite the overwhelming evidence of history, the newspapers, you could come and live with our family for a week and gather enough evidence to convince you. This idea persists. Comes in many forms, perhaps the most influential advocate was Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Lightenment. And even though Rousseau lived off the largesse of a number of wealthy women and abandoned every one of his children, he wrote that man is essentially good, a noble savage, and what corrupts us is society.

Marxism is based on the same idea. Marx says the problem's not in people, the problem is in the system. So what we really need is a labor intensive mode of production.

And of course it is much more flattering to us to think that evil is outside of me. That what's wrong with my life is I've got a bad example or a bad environment or a bad education and that just sometimes I fall for these mistakes.

[21:14] And it's true that a bad environment and a bad example will have their effect. But you know, you could take the nicest child from the nicest family and place that child in the best environment with the best examples and give them the best religious training to offer and you would not have to teach that child how to be selfish.

And all the parents in the building say yes. And I think this is the power of the words of Jesus in our second reading in Mark 7.

The context is one of sincere religiosity. And it tells us that sincerity and religion are useless in dealing with this issue.

The problem with religion is that it makes the problem external to me. But Jesus' view is that there's something so deeply wrong. No amount of religion will help. The problem is not outside us according to Jesus.

It is in our hearts. Let me read you Mark 7. It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. From within, from inside, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, folly.

[22 : 41] All these evils come from inside, says Jesus. It's in Jesus' view you see, that our hearts are the deepest problem, not anything external to us.

And I think Plato's test is still a very good one. Do you remember in the Republic? He said, you want to test your level of virtue? I'll give you a ring, when you put it on you're invisible. Walk around for a week.

See if it reveals what's really in your heart. But don't get me wrong, Jesus is not saying that we are as bad as we could be. But what he is saying is that every part of our personality and humanity has been affected in some way.

My thinking, my living, my choosing, my logic, my creativity, it has all been affected. This world is not as God made it in the beginning.

He is still the creator, this is still his creation, but it has been damaged. And we are still in the image of God, but the image is damaged.

[23 : 49] And I wonder if you would just take your leaflet and look at the second diagram there. Because you see, although this world is good, and although God is good, it is now sin that rules this world.

And that little diagram there, and the cross through the crown demonstrates that we have rejected God as creator. We have placed a little crown on ourselves and our own heads.

The Bible says we cannot run ourselves and we cannot run our society and we cannot run our world. The reason I am telling you this is because this is the beginning of salvation.

Because we will never want to be made new until we see the reality of our guilt before God, until we acknowledge that the root is here in me, that I am hostile to God and I don't want to please him most of the time.

And it is going to take nothing short of the Son of God coming into the world. It is going to take nothing short of him being crucified and rising and offering his life and his spirit to us.

[25 : 03] Because what we need is a new creation, a new humanity with a new nature. we need someone who can mend the rift between us and God.

We need a new life. And as we will see, it is Jesus who comes, who reverses the effects and the nature of sin by taking sin to himself.

And we need to go to him and ask him to give us true repentance and his Holy Spirit that we will be remade after the image of our Creator.

Amen. Amen.

St. John's Shaughnessy.org That address is www.stjohns.org On the website you will also find information about ministries, worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy.

[26 : 17] We hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others. St. John's Shaughnessy.org St. John's Shaughnessy.org