

## **Acts 28:17-31 and Genesis 1:26-2:2**

### **Journey – Creation to Salvation**

So why have you just heard the same reading you had last week from the closing section of Acts.

For one, I don't think it harms to hear Scripture repeated, and to delve into God's word again and again – it always has value and meaning. But more than that I again wanted to highlight or remind you of Paul's journey.

We hear in these verses in the open-ended conclusion of Acts, that Paul spends two years or so welcoming all, proclaiming to them the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ – bringing those who listen and accept to salvation in the Lord.

But we know it didn't start that way – In Acts 9 – Saul the persecutor of Christians encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus and was radically changed 's – you could say it was transformation – a journey in which Saul changed name to Paul, travelled thousands of miles around the Mediterranean and most notably took a transformational journey of faith

and understanding – from fallen sinner to redeemed and saved soul.

It was a God journey – a God inspired journey yes, but one that Paul signed up for – he wanted and accepted what that journey involved in all its joy and pain, and in all its glory and persecution that came his way. And therein lies the rub for folk today – faith, the Christian faith is one you have to take an active movement in – toward trust in God, toward faith in Christ, toward acceptance of the Holy Spirit – and a turning away from sin. It's a journey not all are willing to take.

But the God journey didn't start there, with Jesus and the new covenant – it started way back – hence our reading from Genesis this morning.

Today we are starting a wee 4-week series on Stewardship and this morning we are considering creation, and in later weeks – the resources of our time, our talent and our finance.

So Genesis – the beginning, which is where John starts his Gospel

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

But in a sense the beginning of creation is not the beginning. God is and always has been. IN the Nicene Creed we hear the word

We believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father **before all ages**,

Before all ages – God, the Trinity – was been before time, is now, and ever will be.

But that's God – what about us, humanity?

Well humanity come along on day six. As said a number of times before – I won't get into a discussion on what a day actually mean – other than a period of unmeasured time. But the words are striking

***27 So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.***

In God's image – male and female.

Not patriarchy – but in both male and female... and in God's image.

In God's image is a deeply theological concept – that God created mankind in his own image in verse 27 misses the additional phrase found in verse 26

***26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image,  
in our likeness***

God says let us make mankind in image and likeness, but there is silence about likeness in the created human, so are likeness and image separate.

Origen argued that the image of God referred to humanity after the fall, whereas the term 'likeness of God' referred to human nature after its perfection at the final consummation – when Christ will come again...

And Tertullian that

*The state of being 'in the image of God' relates to his form; in the likeness refers to his or her eternity'.*

It is clear to me that humanity is unique from all other creation, has a different relationship to the creator because of this image and likeness.

In many ways we are so different to God – he is Holy, supernatural, heavenly – is the one who is and was and is to come – the alpha and omega – the beginning and the end. But human beings are the opposite of that – we are ordinary, earthly and limited – we are born yet know we will die.

But in other ways God is also humanlike - God speak, he acts, makes and works in organised ways – and he looks at things noting how good they are, how good His creation is – and how very good humanity is.

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It should also be noted that the method of creation for humanity is different – on days one to five God said. He spoke, and light and darkness were separated; the sky and waters were created; land, sea and vegetation were spoken into being; as were the sun, moon and the stars, as well as the birds, the fish and on day six, the animals – livestock, wild animals and predators too.

All God speaks come forth... but humanity – God creates, God say let US create human beings – to rule, to be fruitful and to multiply. Humans are not spoken into being.

Humanity is different - our beginning journey started with so much promise... as I've said it was very good. Not just OK, not just good as all had been on the first 5 days – but very good!! Yet despite being very good, perfection maybe, there is then the fall.

Human beings are pretty self-centred creature argues NT. Wright. He says in reading the creation narrative in Genesis, we can focus on the creation of human beings as God's pinnacle and skip over the first 5/6<sup>th</sup> of creation.

God does not come to humanity until the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> day. The place of humanity in Genesis 1 suggests there is real importance for the whole created world – the world and its' creatures are not just created for us, though God's word says we have dominion or rule – but they exist in their own right.

And so, I guess that brings me nicely to stewardship.

Stewardship – which we will be considering over the next four weeks, is the job of supervising or taking care of something - it is an ethic of responsible planning and management of resources, that can be applied to the environment and nature, to economics, health, property, information and time among other things.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians

*Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.*

Stewards of God's mysteries?

What does this mean – God's mysteries are many. I think the most learned theologians still somewhat rest in the mystery of God who is at one hand personal and relatable, but at the other is a completely enigmatic. I would say that at heart we must as Christians embrace the mystery of God – it is beyond our words and our intellect. So, as we are asked to be stewards of something we don't fully understand it brings me back to creation – to the world.

Despite the advances of chemistry, biological study, physics and astro-physics and all types of science – we still

understand so little, of even our own world – never mind the cosmos.

Yet God calls us, the last part of the last day of creation, to have dominion and to steward creation – and we're failing miserably.

A planet torn by greed and power, war and conflict, poverty and need does not speak well of our good stewardship. It isn't what I want to be saying – I don't want to be placing a guilt trip upon people, especially as I know it is all so easy to pass by all the desperate need in front of us, never mind getting our heads around the problems that seem far beyond our individual capability. I am as guilty as any – jumping in my car to speed up here because I am trying to squeeze out every last minute of workable time from the day, when in reality I should walk.

In fact, we are all to some greater or lesser degree culpable and contributing to problems in our world, whether they be the heating of the planet, the destruction of rain forest for palm oil, or plastics in our oceans.

But how should it have been...

<sup>28</sup>**God blessed them** and said to them, “**Be fruitful** and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

With God’s blessing we are to be fruitful – well that box has been ticked in terms of population growth – but have we been fruitful in the sense of stewardship. Has our care of the earth and its God given resources been fruitful – yes, we can produce much with the bounty of the earth – from food to I-phone, from clothes to the many modes of transport – but at what cost?

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

On day three God produced vegetation, but we hear that on day six, more plants were given – the difference is that day six is that they will be for food – the shocking implication that humanity was designed to be vegetarian. It is only after disobedience to God that humanity eats meat – in God’s covenant with Noah he says

*“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you green plants, I now give you everything.”*  
(Gen 9.3).

What does that say about us being able to do what we like with the world – to treat it as we want, and to exploit it for our gain? When reading Genesis in this light it is clear that dominion and rule of the earth come with conditions. Condition which we seem unable to do.

So, what about us, what about GMC – what can we do?

Perhaps we should start by considering signing up to Eco-Congregation Scotland, a movement of Scottish church congregations committed to addressing environmental issues through their life and mission. Their Vision is to have a Scotland that cares for God's creation, now and forever.

And so, the mission is to

- In prayer, worship and conversation discover what it means to care for God's creation
- Put that care into action individually, locally, nationally and globally, with a desire to live justly in a transformed world

I wonder if this is something that floats your boat so to speak. Is this something you might like to lead, to join in, to help our church community in? Speak to me.

This is a God journey – from the beginning of His creation, through the travels with his chosen people Israel, through to the incarnation in Jesus, with crucifixion, resurrection and ascension; and onto the Good News to the gentiles mission of Paul reaching Rome and then beyond... and the journey is not complete. Other than we know salvation has come through Jesus Christ... for those who know, love and accept Him as Saviour and Lord the battle is won.

In 1 Peter 4.10 it says

*<sup>10</sup> Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

The manifold grace of God is His grace demonstrated in numerous different ways. We are called to serve God in numerous ways – utilising our gifts for one another and His creation.

One day – Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead... His kingdom will have no end. But until that point, we are called to be good stewards of His creation. Let us together work out how we can be just that – Good Stewards