

Genesis today – God and people

Genesis 2: 4b - 9, 15 -17

(selected verses but read the whole passage if you have a bible)

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up... the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but 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"

These few verses and the early chapters of Genesis have, over the ages, proved more contentious than almost any other passage of scripture. They raise a number of questions, all of them crucial to how we think and practise our faith.

They touch on key aspects of what it means to be a human being living in a physical environment and they challenge us with the concept of the existence of God and of what kind of God it is who we profess and worship.

In order to begin to address some of the questions which this passage raises, we need to pause and ask ourselves if our instincts and our understanding of Genesis 2 has changed at all over the years.

Going back to childhood and Sunday school memories, have we reviewed our thoughts about this passage? Or have we interpreted our thoughts and questioning as simply 'doubt'?

Does the passage have deeper implications than we originally supposed? What, for example, does the idea of an earth which needed human beings to make it complete tell us about God?

What does it tell us about our humanity?

How can we relate these two questions to one another?

There is much in this passage which speaks of the relationship which exists between human beings and a loving and creating God. Central to the concepts

of both creation and redemption, is the 'breath' of God and the 'dust', or earth, in which humanity was conceived and to which it will return.

In what way does this passage speak of the Holy Spirit?

Does the Holy Spirit go on working and creating?

Earth and dust are also associated with creation, redemption and healing. In what sense is humanity 'conceived' out of dust?

The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil are also powerful metaphors for sin and the hope of redemption. Adam and Eve are ultimately banished from Eden lest they eat of the fruit of the tree of life and so live for ever,

What was meant by the knowledge of good and evil?

What do we mean by 'sin'?

What is the connection between 'knowledge' and 'death' (v.17)

What do we mean by innocence?

What does disobedience, in the context of this story, entail? How does it translate into modern life?

If Christ is 'the second Adam', what does his obedience to the Father entail?

What does it mean for us today?

How does it inform our ideas of redemption and salvation? Our ideas about God?

The last set of questions are explored more fully in 'Making Sense of God's Love – Atonement and Redemption' SPCK (2011)