

**“There Were Two Gardens”
Genesis 3:1 – 10; Matthew 26:36 – 44**

Sometimes the best way to begin is to dive right into it.
So in this morning’s readings we encounter our first ancestors living in a garden called Eden.
And they are surrounded by such good things.
In fact in the creation account in Genesis chapter, the word used most often alongside God is ‘good’.

But we have this other entity called “the serpent” and it’s no surprise he comes as a deceiver and his tactic is to pour scorn on the goodness and character of God.

And the upshot of it all is that Adam and Eve sin; it’s the account of the first human sin.

But what was the first sin?
Have you ever scratched your head and wondered what it was about?
I have.
What was behind it all?

“What was the first sin all about?”

Have a chat with the person beside you.

Obviously disobedience was involved but what was behind the disobedience?

The clue is found in the serpent’s words and Eve’s thinking:

“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*”

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also *desirable for gaining wisdom*, she took some and ate it.”

The issue of the tree was who gets to determine what is good and evil: what is in my best interest and what is not?

They can yield to God and enjoy life and freedom or try to find their own way and experience enslavement and death.

In choosing to eat from the tree of good and evil there was deliberate turning away from God's wisdom and goodness and choosing themselves as arbiters of right and wrong.

So the sin here is one of seeking *radical autonomy* and 'autonomy' literally means to be 'a law unto oneself'.

It wasn't simply about knowing 'good from evil' is about knowing and judging for what is right and wrong for themselves.

It was about making ethical and moral decisions without reference to God.

They seceded from God's rule, His good rule and sought self-rule with the belief that they could choose what was best for human flourishing.

They rejected their creaturely status and dependence on God.
They choose self-will over God's rule.

In other words it is about excessive self-regard and self-rule, choosing self over God; they became a law unto themselves.

The result, as we read on in this story, was disastrous.

Imagine the world is a ship.

God placed Adam at the helm and he steered it into the rocks.

So God made Israel the new captain and they kept ramming it into the craggy ocean floor as well.

And it isn't just Adam and Israel; this is us. We've torn the ship of creation asunder: holes have burst through the sides; water flooding; we're heading towards the rocks and a watery grave.

We've sought to rule the earth without God, to live our lives independent of our Maker, to sever creation from the Creator, and in doing so we have rammed to the world into rocks that will destroy.

All of this should sound extremely familiar.

The truth of the Adam and Eve story, the greatest power of this story, is not only that it happened but that it happens.

It not only that the first sin happened but that it is actually still happening.

There is this belief, especially in the Western world, that fulfilment in life – the real life, the good life – is only *really* found outside of God.

There is this common thought that by ejecting God from the world, we are left with a blank page.

And on this blank page we can create a world as we want it to be; we can set the rules, we can set the agenda.

But consider this: more people died under atheist regimes – regimes the explicitly reject the notion of God – then at any other time in history:

Communist China under Mao Zedong – 40+ million deaths

Communist Russia under Stalin – 30+ million

Communist Russia under Lenin - 4 million

Communist Cambodia under Pol Pot - 2 million

Communist North Korea under Kim Il Sung - 1.6 million

These regimes were and are, a law unto themselves.

But I would say that for the majority of us, we live in a vastly different world from that.

Yet there is this deeply embedded belief that we can determine what is in our best interests and God is an impediment.

Consider this:



This was a campaign run in the U.K. early in 2009 by atheist organisations.

What's the inference here?

Well again the inference is that God – especially the God and Father of Jesus Christ – is an obstacle to enjoying life.

He causes people to 'worry'.

He is an obstacle to you enjoying your life.

See if you can complete the following:

“Be true to... yourself.”

“Follow your... dreams.”

“Listen to your... heart”

“Whatever you decide to do, make sure it makes you... happy”

Well done, your good disciples of Western individualistic autonomy😊.

God only becomes a part of this equation in much as He endorses this belief.

But you see, this thinking, this sense that you know, “it's all about me and my fulfilment, and God is an impediment”, has embedded itself in Western culture.

As it has done so it has caused the chaos of the fall to be recreated all over again.

I mean, this thinking creates havoc in families, where families are seen as valuable in as much as the fulfil me.

It's creates havoc in workplaces, where colleagues are viewed as competitors.

It creates havoc in places of learning, where some views are acceptable and some are not.

And the further the West is from its Christian foundations the greater this thinking will take hold, and the more societies and individuals will see themselves as a law unto themselves.

But what about us who follow Jesus?

Well there were two gardens in our readings today.

The other garden is Gethsemane, an olive grove.

In our reading Jesus has come to the garden to pray.

Jesus what is up ahead, knowing what is going to experience, has to, must, pray.

Crucifixion was a common practice in under Roman rule.

It was a form of execution of the worst kind.

From it we get word excruciating.

It was a shameful death where people would stand naked, often for days, on display for the world to see.

Jesus seeing what is ahead was “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”.

Mark says that Jesus was “sorrowful and troubled.”

The English doesn’t quite capture what Jesus was feeling; Jesus is feeling acute emotional pain, loathing and dread.

He is literally overcome with horror.

Ever had that feeling in the pit of your stomach about a fast approaching event?

You’ve got to have a conversation with someone and you know it’s not going to be pretty.

For me in my teenage years, as I said, it was exams and class speeches.

The thought of either made me sick in my stomach.

And the first time I preached, for the week leading up, I was a bundle of nerves.

I had that sick feeling in the bottom of my stomach.

But of course that’s nothing, absolutely nothing, compared to what Jesus was experiencing.

Jesus is *overwhelmed* with sorrow.

He’s experiencing such mental and emotional pain that it hems him in on every side with no way of escape.

Imagine if tomorrow you, without a shadow of a doubt, you were going to be executed. But not quickly and cleanly (if there is such a thing) but by being tortured for hours and hours on end until you finally die. That’s what Jesus was facing.

That in itself is enough to break even the sternest soul.

But it’s not just revulsion around the physical torture he has to endure. There is something more.

What did Jesus pray?

My Father, if it is possible, *may this cup be taken from me*. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Jesus talks about the “cup”; what was the “cup”?

In the Old Testament the 'cup' is the "cup of God's wrath".
It's God's settled anger and judgement against everything that defaces good and beautiful world and those who bear His image.
It is the cup of God's wrath.

And Jesus could see that in his death on a Roman Cross he would experience something he'd never experienced before – the penalty of sin: the loss of God's presence and love

He would not only bear the sins of the world he would pay the price as well.

Jesus will have to drink the bitter dregs of the cup – every disappointment, every setback, every betrayal, every sexual sin and act of violence, every word intended to wound and every thought centred on self, and every rejection of God's love – He did it for us, in our place instead of us.

It's more almost more than He can bear.
He didn't want to drink it. He badly didn't want to.

So Jesus begs and begs the Father not to take him through it.
But how can Jesus possibly ask for cup to be taken from him, not once but three times?

In this moment of intense psychological, emotional and spiritual distress, if there's another way, Jesus wants out.

So will God's Son will Jesus abandon the redemption project?

Well, Jesus also prays, "not as I will, but as you will."

He entrusts himself to His Father and begins to undo the work of the Fall.
It's a reversal; where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus will succeed.

The Father sends his Son to take the helm of the ship, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they're out to set creation straight. In Jesus is righting the ship called creation that Adam smashed into the rocks; filling the holes, emptying the water and steering it straight again as God intended.

Where Adam failed Jesus succeeded.
Where Adam failed and brought sin and death into the world, Jesus triumphed and brought life and hope.
Where Adam doomed humanity, Jesus redeemed it.

The question then for us is “whose will?”

I don’t know of many professing Christians who see themselves as a law unto themselves.

For Christians I think this self-law, this temptation and sin to be a law unto oneself, is in pockets.

You guys are great but why is it in some churches that you talk about money and suggest that it might be really good to give even a portion of your income on a regular basis, it’s like you you’d just sworn at everyone?

Why is it that in some churches if you talk about Christians having a consistent sexual ethic upheld by Scripture and Church tradition for the last two thousand years, you’re narrow minded, bigoted and irrelevant?

In some churches if you champion good works and social justice you’re validated, but is you talk about ‘evangelism’, you’ve used a dirty word?

And as individual’s there are can areas that have never come under Jesus’ good and gracious rule.

There often areas where we have never bent the knee and bowed the heart.

There was solicitor who took Jesus’ words seriously and gave up a lucrative law practice to spend his life helping poor people obtain decent housing. One day, his wealthy brother confronted him by saying, “Look at what you’re doing with your life.” The brother went on to say, “Don’t get me wrong. I believe in being a Christian, up to a point.”

The Reformer Martin Luther stated, “There are three conversions necessary to everyone: the head, the heart and the wallet [or purse].”

But the question for us as followers of Jesus is, “How do we learn to submit to God’s will and God’s rule?”

How do we say, “Your will be done” in the various areas of our lives?

I mean, we can give it lip service.

We sing, “You are my King.”

So what about us?

Is it by sheer willpower?

I don’t think it is.

It is recognising Jesus' Divine kingship. Absolutely.

Here's what I think the Spirit is saying to us from this passage this morning: I think is often about learning to accept the "No's" as much as we "Yes" in our lives.

There are so many ways in which God in Jesus says "Yes" to us. True?
We receive so much from God.

Yet alongside these there are "no's".
And God's "no" are just gracious his "yes".
In Eden there was one 'no' and it would have preserved Adam and Eve.
It would have kept them from harm.

When I look back over the 30+ years I've been a follower of Jesus, what I have found is this: people, even those follow Jesus, who never come accept the "No's" find themselves changed – on the inside.
It can range from a joylessness to a bitterness.

The "No" that we might encounter may come in the form of circumstances.
We might find ourselves in situations and circumstances we never thought we faced.
We might find ourselves in a place we never really wanted to be.

Many, many years ago I was an intern at a church and primary area of responsibility was among youth. I was involved with leading youth programmes and studies and services and so on. The Youth Pastor announced that at the end of the year, which was only a few months away, he was going to retire.

So the weeks went by and then in a staff setting it was announced out of the blue that 'Fred' was going to be the new youth pastor. And it was like a stab through the heart. I mean, it was big 'thumbs down' to me as a person. All these feelings of rejection welled up inside me. It was a big fat "No."

But I also knew in my heart I wasn't the right person for the role. It could have been handled better. All the same I wrestled with that for a long time.

It could be a whisper from the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't long after being a new believer that I heard a whisper in my Spirit that alcohol wasn't to be me. So there was season in my life where that was to be the case.

It might come in the form of Limitations, new limitations in our lives.

It could be a word in Scripture.

So as we come to the table this morning, as we journey toward the cross, is there an area that God is speaking to you about where you need to give up self-rule and say, “Not my will but your will be done”.