

SERMON NOTES Sunday 26th February 2023

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **The Greatest Story Ever Told: In the Beginning**

Passages: **Nehemiah 9.5b-6, Genesis 3.1-24**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

What makes a great story?

Here are some characteristics that we have identified as making a really good story. Handily they all begin with the letter 'R': resonance, reach, resolution and redemption. The very best stories also have a ring of truth.

The greatest story ever told

Over the next 5 weeks as we journey together through Lent, we will be looking together at God's story as it unfolds in the pages of the Bible. On Palm Sunday we'll share in Jesus' beautiful and agonising entry into Jerusalem and then journey with him through the last week of his life to the climax of his story and of God's story; his crucifixion and resurrection. On the way, we'll see the many ways in which we are part of God's story and God is part of each of our stories.

Different ways of understanding

It would be a mistake for us to feel that a scientific understanding of the way the universe began and unfolded contradicts a belief in a loving God who created and sustains everything that is. God's story from Genesis 1 onwards to Revelation is vital, exciting and relevant. It is the greatest story ever told!

It started out so well.....

In the beginning, God... God's people from the first have seen God as the maker of everything. And all that God made was good. Our passage from Nehemiah tells the same truth as Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Psalm 100 and Psalm 104. This is not a truth that has a sell by date on it. We may know more about how the universe came into being than the writers of the Old Testament but they are not trying to explain HOW the universe began and developed. What they're doing is affirming that it was God who created everything (whatever the process actually was). That good creation included us (Gen 1.27 & 31)

.....But then things went wrong.

St Paul put his finger on the reality of the human predicament in Romans 7.15-24. He is echoing a cry that has echoed down the generations ever since humans had voices to shout. We are not as we would like to be. This is expressed with real agonising poetry in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

Stories from long ago, burning with relevance for today

Both these stories of the beginning of things speak powerfully our own lost generation about what it means to be human:

The story of creation affirms that we matter. It affirms that we have a responsibility to future generations to care for our planet. It affirms that it is worth trying to make a difference even when things seem hopeless.

The story of Adam and Eve reminds us that all people, even the best, even the ones we want to put on a pedestal, are struggling like us (and like St Paul) with our demons and our tragic, banal nastiness.

St Paul knows that redemption is to be found. He asks the question 'Who will rescue me from this body of sin and death?' (Rom 7.24) by exclaiming 'Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Rom 7.25)

More of this as our series unfolds!

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

- 1. What are the things that you find most challenging to your faith in a good creator God? How do you talk about these things with yourself? Do you ever talk with other people about them? Why not have that discussion now?*
- 2. How can we keep a balance as we see ourselves (and other people) as both made in the glorious image of God (Gen 1.27) and capable of the rebellion we read of in Genesis 3? Try looking at Romans 7.14-25, in 'The Message' version of the Bible as well as the NIV if you can.*
- 3. We live in a society that doesn't really have a thought-through view of what it is to be human. Thinking about our nuanced Christian understanding of what it is to be human, how do we share this with other people?*
- 4. It can feel daunting when we're talking about scientific stuff, like the origins of the universe. Talk about how you feel when you are involved in discussions like this. How do you try to behave as a witness to the God who made, sustains and loves his creation?*
- 5. Lent began last Wednesday. Are there any things that you could give up or take up for the period of Lent that might help you as a steward of the wonderful, beautiful world that God has created?*