

doG for Dyslexics!

Genesis 2¹⁵⁻¹⁵, 3¹⁻⁷; Psalm 32; Romans 5¹²⁻¹⁹; Matthew 4¹⁻¹¹

Did God say?(Genesis 3¹)

While we were away we sent the dogs to a training school. We expected to come back and find happy hounds, cheerfully obeying commands. Instead we observed miserable mutts trudging through a routine that inspired neither them nor us. The paperwork we received as their 'report' had 10 rules that have to be adhered to for one month, including:

- Do not use the dogs name
- Do not look at the dog
- Do not praise the dog
- Do not allow the dog into the leisure areas of the home

You do not need a degree in psychology to understand that this is a way to undermine the dogs confidence so that it never knows that it is accepted or has earned approval.

As we begin Lent - especially with the readings we have today - you could easily fall into the trap that God had been to the Powys School for Dogs and adhered to the character destroying advice they gave.

- ✦ Genesis has the story of the fall - of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden who fall into the devils' trap of doubting what God said - **Did God say?** There was one rule, it couldn't have been clearer - but that is how the devil manipulates our thinking and we end up mistrusting God. It is clear from Genesis that God created human beings to relate to them, which was why God walked with them in the Garden: the devil takes the freedom of relationship and turns it into something grotesque by making rules for our protection into a means of control.
- ✦ The Psalmist talks about joy in forgiveness and freedom from guilt. It makes the point that failure to face up to our sins (the things that separate us from God) and our unwillingness to confess makes us wither as people. God makes forgiveness a possibility precisely because he is aware we will fail: instead of beating us up with our failure he already has provided a way out.

- ✦ Romans sums up the Gospel. **Sin came into the world through one person and death came through sin** but that is counterbalanced by **the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ**. Paul repeats this and says, **Just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's righteousness led to justification and life for all**. You can't hope for clearer than that.

In no way am I minimising the fact that we all sin. The Ten Commandments isn't an exam paper where you can choose to do three of the ten to suit yourself. God's standards are absolute. However, he lives for relationship with us, not alienate and humiliate us. When we fall we are forgiven, but we have to try NOT to fall.

That is why Jesus goes on to give us a masterclass in how to deal with the devil:

- ✦ Note that Jesus had completed the fast in the wilderness and it is that most vulnerable point that the devil strikes. Hunger would be reasonable after 40 days of not eating and Jesus could have eaten - the devil was offering a short cut; as he was with the second temptation that Jesus reveal God's power by a single spectacular act rather than a faithful ministry; as it was in the third temptation as a short-cut to worship by selling his soul rather than the obedience of the cross. The devil never tempts us with things that are unattractive to us! He knows us very well!
- ✦ Jesus deals with the devil by quoting Scripture. Eve tried debating with the devil and lost. **It is written** is used against each of the three temptations. In any debate there can be some hesitation or softening of a view: by quoting the devil can't manipulate us. The challenge is to know our Bible better than the devil knows us!

Our dog trainer got it the wrong way round - so lets correct it: turning doG's rules into God's rules:

- God calls us by name;
- God actively looks for us;
- God sees us through the eyes of a parent and so doesn't just praise us but loves us;
- God invites us to live with him.

Don't use Lent as an excuse to beat yourself with how bad you are - get to know the Bible so that you can beat the devil up: that's much better and much more satisfying!