

I wonder what you think of the story of Adam and Eve. We look at them as models of our own flawed humanity, earth creatures, born of God's love, inevitably on a path towards, not complete failure, but many a stumble, and quite a few falls along the way.

The story of their fall and what we call 'original sin' is often imagined to be THE sin from which all ours follow. I prefer to think of it as the sin of their origin, that is, their humanity. Our fallible nature, our weakness, is built into the stuff of our origin, our human being.

I hear sermons which quote their disobedience as the cause of all this. Well, yes, but the problem doesn't start with disobedience. Disobedience is the consequence, the outcome of a deep weakness, which is arrogance. Those first experiments in autonomous living, given as they were, as we are, with the freedom to act according to the prodding of our own will, continue with us. And we fall short. Thank God that God, in Christ, shows how the gap can be bridged, through love and grace.

We give thanks that God does not desire the death of a sinner, but that, in grace and love, we are restored time and again to the perfection into which we are created. Only to fall, time and again.

In a rare lectionary excursion into the hidden texts of the Apocrypha, we find the joy today of Ecclesiasticus, usually called Sirach these days, to avoid confusion with Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew scriptures we call the OT.

We read *The beginning of pride is sin*. And well said. And I like to think that the beginning of sin is pride. Adam and Eve show how this happens. They disobey God's instruction because they think they know better. And they lose their humility. 'We don't have to do what God says. We are intelligent beings and know what is best for ourselves and the creation in which we are set'.

Well, what a familiar refrain! Nothing has changed since we first put on human flesh. We continue to go our own way, how is it phrased:

The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker.

And in Hebrews, we are reminded to follow the example of at least some of our leaders and to imitate their faith. *Do not neglect to do good, to share what you have – for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*. Like the prophet Micah, whose prophecy attests to the deep sensitivity of God to humility in the social responsibility we hold. *What does God require of us? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God*.

These are not the characteristics of pride and arrogance, the self-first, put others in their place philosophy of life that seems to lubricate much of our society across the world. And far from the pattern of God in Christ, the ultimate selfless exemplar of how God wants us to live.

So Jesus asks us, at any and all gatherings in which we find ourselves, to approach our place with humility, to sit below the salt in the least prominent, the lowliest seat. And we may well be invited – *Friend, go up higher*.

This is the humility of obedience. And the word 'humility' has its roots, of course, in the Latin humus, the earth. Humility, to extend the argument, means been fixed in the element from which we are made, to which we shall return, earth to earth, dust to dust. Adam, the name given to that first earth creature, means 'from the earth'. Adamah. We might say that humility demands of us that we are

grounded, with our feet firmly on, or even in, the place of our origin. We are connected to the elements of being human wherever we find ourselves.

God has placed us there, here, to be obedient to the needs of this place.

In our home of Australia, aboriginal spirituality is bound up in the earth, in place, in what our indigenous sisters and brothers call 'country'. That is why the dispossession of their country from the first settlement onwards, and it continues, is a repudiation not of ownership but of identity; people ripped out by the roots of the place of which they are a part. There is, for all of us, a sense of belonging and of obedience to it. For us, it is here and everywhere, and a deep grounding in God's being, in us being the body of Christ.

Today we shall bless the members of the Church Council, something I promised to do when the wardens were commissioned. One of the reasons we love coming here is that this place is populated by people of great generosity of spirit. Sometimes, one wonders how and why we find ourselves in positions of responsibility and leadership. Usually it is the call of obedience, the following of a call from God (remember last week when we were encouraged to tune in to the promptings of God from all corners of our experience) a call that comes perhaps when someone asks if we can maybe do something, add something, contribute something. It is a prod to our own knowledge of self – is this something I could do? Will it serve a greater purpose? And what happens if I say no?

In one of the post-communion prayers we use at home, we say

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

We who are called to serve God, not just on the Council or in doing something specific, but in every aspect of who we are and what we do, respond in a state of humble confidence. We take on such work, not because we are important people, or wish to be seen as more important or prominent, but because we are called to important things.

Remember how Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that the cup be taken from him. He didn't want to do it, but 'not my will but thine be done'.

Let me suggest that we are similarly bound in where we are, though the ties are different. To be obedient to the call of our own country, our own parish community, our city, our nation, continent and planet is a call from God, who calls 'friend, move up higher'. This is not an invitation to attach more stripes on the arm, more braid on the shoulder, more prestige, position or wealth, but a call to step up to what draws you, to what you are equipped to undertake. It is not an easy road we are called to walk, but in my experience God doesn't ask us to do anything without, in some measure, equipping us for it.

And the Lord will enthrone the lowly and plant the humble in their place; those who humble themselves will be exalted.

The great prayer of St Ignatius of Loyola:

Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest;
to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do thy will.

And I leave you with an invitation, not from me but from God : Good friends of Christ Church,
people well-grounded and generous, move up higher.