

## **Sunday 22 February – First Sunday of Lent**

### **Sermon by Wendy Borgartz**

*An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)*

### **Know your limits**

One of the things that has stuck within my brain since I first heard it at a Lent course session several years ago is about Jesus being the antetype of Adam. In the old way of printing, before electronic printers were invented, letters were put together into words then sentences by typesetters, with the letter sticking out to pick up the ink and put the word on the page. This was called the type, and the antetype was where, instead of the letter sticking up to be printed it was recessed, so the words would stand out as white against black instead of black against the white of the paper. It is an image that has always resonated with me, one of Jesus standing out in relief as the matching image, yet positive instead of negative in reverse to Adam. This image is apparent this morning, with our reading from Genesis, where Adam and Eve give in to the wiles of the serpent set against the Gospel reading with Jesus not giving in to the temptations of the devil.

As human beings, we are limited, finite beings. We are born, we live, we die to this life, we live within the bounds of time and space. We cannot travel forwards or back in time; we cannot be in more than one place at the same time (much as we might sometimes wish we could). God as part of creation has set limits on us, and he sets further limits over the way we should live, with the ten commandments, which Jesus summarised into just the two: to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. It is when we try to get round the limits that God has set upon us, whether they be physical or in the way we should live, that we end up in trouble and things go wrong. Think of what happened when humans pushed against God's boundaries just in Genesis alone – we have Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit and being made to leave Eden, we have the great flood, we have the tower of Babel. Things go wrong when we break God's rules.

By contrast, God is limitless – you cannot set any boundaries on God, He just is. You cannot put God in a box, you cannot define or restrict God. God's love is infinite, his care for us is without any boundaries.

In the wilderness, the devil tempts Jesus to claim unlimited abundance – you can even turn these stones into bread; unlimited protection – angels will swoop in to save you; and unlimited power – over all the kingdoms of the earth. The irony is that Jesus has already got all of these things, think of him feeding 5,000 people with just two loaves and five fish; he is raised from the dead at the resurrection, you can't get much more protection than that; he is already Lord of all, because he is God's living Word present from the very beginning of the creation. There is nothing the devil can offer him that he does not already have. He may be physically hungry and lonely after 40 days and nights in the wilderness, even though he would have been buoyed up by God's words of affirmation at his baptism just before he went into the wilderness. Jesus knows who he is and that he already has unlimited abundance, protection and power – but has given them up to come and live as one of us and to die for us. It is the devil, not Jesus, who is craving these things that God has. The devil is as taken in by his own power grab as Adam and Eve are taken in: he has not realised that God is not like that.

And we too, as humans, are tempted by unlimited abundance, unlimited protection and unlimited power. We are just like Adam and Eve, who knew they were made in God's image but still thought there had to be more to it than God was telling them, so they ate the forbidden fruit to find out. You only have to look at the news headlines to see the examples of us giving in to the temptations. There are the statistics on the unfair distribution of wealth, both between different countries and also within our own country. There are all the claims and statements about stopping and deporting illegal immigrants and keeping out refugees. We are not just tempted by having more wealth, more power, more protection from others, we actively seek them out, making a deal with the devil instead of trusting God to provide. We forget that God is a God of abundance, that if we ask it will be given to us and if we seek, we will find. Instead we rush to try and grab what isn't ours in the first place. God placed us in the creation to look after it and tend it, but it belongs to God, not to us. Jesus has already paid the price for us; his grace provides for us all. Life and the right way of living in relationship with God has been given to us for free, we just have to accept it and work within the values and limits that God has set for us to follow.

So perhaps during this Lent we need to remember what has been given to us through Christ's sacrifice and also to remember our limits. We are

humans, we are created in the image of God and called good by God. We are made righteous through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. During Lent we could try to remember God's unlimited abundance, protection and power. When we are tempted to break through the limits God has set for us for our well-being, instead may we turn to Christ and remember to worship God alone and to trust in God to provide what we need. We don't need to make a deal with the devil, because we have been given the gift of God's only Son. Perhaps we can also use this Lent as a time to examine our consciences and to repent of those times when we have thrown stones instead of shared bread, when we have opted for self-preservation instead of protecting the vulnerable, when we have taken control instead of sharing power with others. When we have spent time in prayer and reading scripture we can then be in that right relationship with God. God can find us open and receptive and waiting for Him so that we can feel He has surrounded us with His love. Then we can find that we are what we have longed to be: precious and made in His image.

Amen