

Sexagesima 2024 (Second Service)
St Thomas, Salisbury.

Genesis 2:4b-end
Luke 8:22-35

May the words of my lips and the meditation of all of our hearts being now and always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week we were processing around the aisles of this church, lighted candles in our hands, celebrating the end of the Christmas season. And yet, in that great celebration, we remembered that amidst all of ancient Simeon's recognition of the tiny baby as the 'light to lighten the Gentiles', words we say or sing every day as we say our daily prayers, and indeed as we sang just a few moments ago, we remember also that part of Simeon's message to Mary was, 'a sword shall pierce your own soul too.' Christmas leads to the Cross. There are swords in this child's future.

And as our focus shifts towards those swords, towards that Cross, Holy Mother Church, being ever a good psychologist, gives us these three weeks before Lent to reset ourselves, and to prepare for the trials to come. Because Easter is so early we lose the first week this year, but today is Sexagesima, '60 days Sunday', the second Sunday before Lent. Notice the images we are given before we dive into the rigours of Lent. This week, creation. And then next week, which I leave to Sarah to deal with, the Transfiguration. There's a reason why we get these two important glimpses into the nature of God, the nature of Christ, before we take up our cross and follow him into the darkness.

We must remember where we *started*. And we must remember where we are *going*.

So this evening we hear the account of creation. Actually the second account - there are two in Genesis of course. And we are reminded that we are not just accidents. We are lovingly created. How beautiful that image of Adam being moulded. Any of us who have watched a potter at their wheel, or indeed have some skill in pottery ourselves, can imagine the careful movement of the fingers and thumbs, the attentiveness by which the potter produces from an indistinct lump something lovely, something beautiful. Just so is our creation. The intimacy of the breath of life being breathed into our nostrils. Like a kiss. And also that we are made for each other. "It is not good for the man to be alone". Notice how lovingly you are created. With care and attention. With an awareness that we need each other. That there must be society. That God kisses our life into us.

And then our second reading. Actually I think we could have managed with just the first paragraph. Creation is a gift, of which we are part. But the Christ who is about to pick up his cross and stride into the darkness is Lord of that creation. We don't go into Lent, in a couple of weeks' time, out of some misplaced desire for self-punishment. We follow the one "who commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." I suppose the second half of the reading also reminds us of Christ's utter lordship, not only over the created order but the spiritual powers work against God as well.

So tonight on this Sexagesima Sunday, feel your creation. Remind yourself how lovingly you are moulded. And begin to prepare follow that creator wherever he will lead, through a world where, despite our own misguided attempts to wrest control from God and do it on our own, if we are able to listen attentively enough, "the heavens are telling the glory of God."

Amen.