

## Two Big Pictures

### A Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent

25 February 2007

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#### Readings:

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

Psalm 91: 9-16

Romans 10: 8-13

Luke 4: 1-13

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Crossroads joke:

Directions?

1. The Easter Bunny
2. A priest who finishes sermons on the Monday before the Sunday
3. A priest who finishes sermons late on Saturday

Number 3 – Numbers 1 & 2 are figments of the imagination!

BUT: I had to do some preparation for this BEFORE going away, not only for my own sake but also for the 9.00am musicians today who wanted to choose hymns thematically, so this was prepared in draft form TEN days ago. [Someone please clap.]

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#### Sermon Notes

As I read the readings and considered the themes for Lent, it jumped out at me: On this first Sunday in Lent, the readings have been chosen to set the big picture for us. In fact, not just one picture, but two! [Perhaps you can find more, and that's fine; I'm sticking to two.]

Picture One: Humanity is sinful and in need of help regarding sin

Picture Two: God is merciful and compassionate, desiring of salvation for all

Let's unpack those...

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Picture One:            Humanity is sinful and in need of help regarding sin  
                                  Sin separates us from God and we need God to deal with  
                                  that, being unable to do so ourselves

You won't find those words in quite such a neat sentence in today's readings, but those words sum up our understanding, from the Scriptures and from the life and words of Jesus Christ.

Sin is not only about "little, individual acts of sin", but also the bigger picture of lack of adequate response to God

***Disclaimer:*** *Shouldn't refer to anything sinful as "little", and don't want to give impression of regarding sin of any sort as of little consequence. But there's a tendency to think of sin only as certain individual acts of commission or omission that are wrong, and to lose the big picture of SIN as separation from God, in which we see life essentially from our perspective as opposed to looking at it from God's perspective.*

Steve de Gruchy's article in the Witness towards the end of the lengthy debate on the book by Richard Dawkins

- In debate of whether there's a God or not... have lost sight of issue of human wrong – "sin"
- Undeniable; 9 / 10 headlines relate to such issues, including use / abuse of power, resources, damage to people and nations and earth in the process; Even Crime!
- Acknowledging the reality of human mess
  - "dark, bleak"
- Into that, comes Jesus...
- Even religious people / the church & religious systems are part of the problem

Quote seen in yesterday's Witness, by Blaise Pascal, 17<sup>th</sup> C French Christian and philosopher:

“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”

Biography on Desmond Tutu – John Allen's “Rabble-Rouser for Peace”:  
The dumped people – resettlement – the little girl who said she “borrowed” food, couldn't always “return it” so then they filled their tummies with water before they went to bed at night

Own experience in (former) Western Transvaal resettlement areas (visitor, first hand observer, parish initiated support for employment and agricultural projects for those areas)

Religious sanction (as per quotation from Pascal); policies supported as “Christian” by good church people, good church ministers and their leaders

Personal morality issues focussed on, but lost sight of the bigger picture, which is...

- How we relate to God
- How we view (and thus treat) other people
- Observance of the commandments (Ten / Love God and Neighbour)
- Awareness of God filtering into every aspect of how we live

In the light of that, let's be reminded of Picture Two:

God is merciful and compassionate, desiring of salvation for all

**Gospel:**

Jesus in wilderness – very real temptation

Grappled, like us (yet without sin)

- Abuse status as Son of God
- Appeal of power and splendour – greed (root of much human sin)
  - Heresy in Satan saying he had power to give these things
- Put God to the test, inappropriately

Temptation: Take focus from God to self – purely selfish; greed and failure to acknowledge God in rightful ways

**Deuteronomy:**

God's leading of the Hebrews from slavery and oppression to freedom

NT theology uses that as an analogy for Jesus Christ!

God's deliverance; calls forth a response...

Honour God, obey, understand God had taken direct intervention in their lives as individuals and community in order to reveal God's nature and intentions, and ultimately so that God's Kingdom could be revealed to all the world

(Goes on call for the people to rejoice and celebrate God's provision of good things, and in the process to remember the people unable to take care of their needs – the fatherless, the widows, the alien (like 'migrant workers')

**Romans:**

God's assurance of salvation especially through Jesus Christ, the one raised from death

Those who genuinely call on God for salvation will receive it; God's desire is for all to receive it – no desire on God's part for condemnation!

(Tutu: "Prisoners of hope" – shamelessly optimistic; the guy who died on Friday rose again on Sunday...)

**Conclusion:**

Any conclusion today would be inadequate. Lent like a journey – taking us again to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Also culminates in the special annual celebration of the Resurrection. We'll see where this journey takes us, so that we may once again understand what God is about, and make sure that even if we have lots of individual "little pictures", we keep sight of the main themes – the big picture of God

**One: Humanity is sinful and in need of help regarding sin**

**Two: God is merciful and compassionate, desiring of salvation for all, and in Jesus Christ, has provided the help for sin that we need**

**Collect:**

God, be with us in our weakness (our temptation / easily give in to sin)  
... in order that we may know your power to save!