

Our Minister writes:

Hello Everyone

But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)

It was probably more than 30 years ago that I read a survey which was conducted among British teenagers and young adults that was attempting to identify the things that most filled their thoughts. The results were both predictable and surprising. Apparently, though not such a great surprise to those of us who are or have been parents to teenagers, the first thing that fills the thoughts of a young person is food!

When you think about it, we all spend a great deal of time planning, preparing, cooking and eating. A weekly trip to the supermarket to shop for a family will probably take more than an hour and will often cost more than £100. While people do not prepare meals from fresh ingredients so much as our parents and grandparents did, nevertheless the whole process is time-consuming. Most people will agree that a microwave and a dishwasher are not really the answer.

The second thing that teenagers and young adults thought about most was the whole issue of relationships. Of course, these include relationships with parents, school-mates, work colleagues, and friends as well as boyfriends and girlfriends. People invest a huge amount of time, money and emotion into relationships. When relationships go wrong, people will often say that it was because they stopped putting the time and effort into the relationship that once they did.

It was the third thing that teenagers and young adults thought most about that was more of a surprise. It was guilt. ‘Guilt’ is a complex psychological emotional experience that cannot be discussed fully in a few brief sentences. However, the very fact that teenagers and young adults identified it as one of the three most important things that filled their thoughts shows it is not something we should try to avoid.

What does all this have to do with *Tuesdays Together*? Good question! I don’t know whether to start or to summarise this article with the Bible study we have been doing in Genesis (chapters 1 to 3). Perhaps we had better start with it. There’s quite a lot about food and eating in these early chapters of the Bible. There’s also a lot about relationships and, from Genesis 3 onwards, the whole area of guilt and shame come to the forefront of the narrative.

It was fashionable for many years to describe the opening chapters of Genesis (particularly chapters 1 to 11) as ‘myth’. I find this a very unhelpful label for although a traditional story explaining the origin of things (‘aetiological story’) is one understanding of ‘myth’, an alternative definition of ‘myth’ is ‘a widely held but false belief or idea’. Instead, I prefer to see these ancient narratives as a kind of ‘retrospective apocalyptic’ (don’t be frightened by the label ... read on!).

‘Apocalyptic’ comes from a Greek word meaning ‘revelation’ (things are revealed that could not be known apart from this revelation). In the Bible, the book of Revelation is the major example of apocalyptic writing but there are apocalyptic writings elsewhere (e.g. parts of Joel, Zechariah and Daniel). When reading ‘apocalyptic’ writing, it is clearly important to distinguish between those things that are literal and those that are symbolic – it’s not always as easy as we might think!

The same is true with the early chapters of Genesis – distinguishing between the literal and the symbolic can be difficult. Traditionally-minded Bible-readers (like me) will enlist the help of the New Testament to understand the Old. The New Testament affirms a literal and historical Adam (Romans 5:12-21) but does not offer an opinion on the actual circumstances of the fall or give us any particular insight as to the meaning of the forbidden fruit.

The Genesis passage forms a useful foundation for considering spiritual food, spiritual and personal relationships and guilt. Just as what we are eating day-by-day affects our physical health, so our 'spiritual diet' affects our spiritual health. The *Tuesdays Together* programme can become a vital part of our 'spiritual diet'. Every evening is focused on the Bible and the variety of evenings enables people with different ways of taking-in to be nourished in a way that helps them.

Since my days in ministerial training, I have been interested in the work of John Wesley (1703-91). I have read extensively about his early life, read some of his sermons, letters and other writings and hope to become more knowledgeable about his hymn translations. I know a fair bit about him – but I do not know him. It is possible to know a lot about the Lord Jesus Christ – and that's a good thing – but the Bible offers us the possibility, by faith, of knowing him personally (Phil. 3:10).

After doubt and disobedience had caused the relationship between the man and God to break down, God did not leave the man hiding in guilt and shame but called out to him, 'Where are you?' (Genesis 3:9). As the Bible narrative unfolds, it will chart God's plan to renew the relationship with his people. This plan is fulfilled by the ministry of Jesus. It holds out the possibility of being 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven' (H. F. Lyte, *HP* 13) in a living relationship, free from guilt.

I am grateful to all those who work hard preparing for the various evenings of *Tuesdays Together*. Maybe if you try one (whether it be 2B1 – worship and praise; Prayers & Reflections; Explore Together or the more traditional Bible Study), you will want to try them all. They will be food for your spiritual growth, nurture for your relationship with Jesus and remind you of the wonder of the gospel of full salvation in Jesus Christ. It will also draw you into closer fellowship with others.

God Bless

John Haley
Minister