

Lord God, help us to relate the written word to our lives, through the power of your Spirit. Amen.

- What makes you feel unsettled? Is it when you think you might have said something to upset someone? Or when you're facing something new or challenging. Or when you want to change your lifestyle but you don't quite know how. Or you have a big decision to make. Or when you're left feeling dissatisfied because you feel you really could have done something differently. Does this ring bells for you?
- How would you describe feeling unsettled? An underlying anxiety, but you can't always put your finger on what's causing it? An inability to focus on whatever it is you are supposed to be doing? Problems in concentrating on what people around you are saying?
- And is feeling in this way a common sensation for you or something that happens but rarely? In my experience of people watching, it seems that whilst for some of us feeling unsettled is a relatively unusual emotion, for others it is something that we live with day by day.
- I want to suggest that this morning's readings give us three different views of the world and that these will have a direct implication on how used we are to feeling like this. I also want to suggest that there are times when feeling unsettled is not a bad thing. It can be a really positive indication of where we are with God.
- They're two well-known bible passages. Adam, Eve and the serpent. And Jesus being tempted in the desert.
- The first part of the Old Testament reading sets the scene. God created human beings to live in paradise. *'The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.'*
- Eden. The world as it should be. The world without sin. The Kingdom of heaven so intimately interconnected with earth that it's impossible to tell the difference. That's what we were created for. To walk with God. *'to till it and keep'* the earth. To husband it and care for it. To name the animals. In biblical terms once you know someone's name you understand them. To live in a creative and positive relationship with the created world; with human beings, Adam and Eve together; and with God, who is so close that we talk to him face to face.
- This is clearly a wonderful place to be, and you get the impression that once God had created Eve, a companion and a lover, feeling unsettled was not part of humanity's experience. How could they possibly want for more?
- Adam and Eve are free. Without sin. But please note that freedom does not mean that there are no boundaries. If there were not, it would lead to anarchy.
- With absolute freedom, I am presumably free to focus fully on myself and covet my neighbour's ox, wife or ass. And if I am absolutely free then I am able, with no form of guilt, to appropriate my neighbour's ox, wife or ass.
  - And even the most casual look at the interactions of the world today forces us into the conclusion that this sort of freedom invariably leads to pain and chaos!
- It seems to me that the tree of knowledge of good and evil is a recognition of this basic fact. *'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'* A boundary. Freedom within the structure of positive relationships that make up the personality of creation.
- So the implication seems to be that if you are one of those apparently incredibly lucky people for whom feeling unsettled is an uncommon experience then you are either living in Eden, the Kingdom of God, or you are so at home in the fallen world in which we live at present that it has become comfortable.
  - That's the first basic stance about feeling unsettled.
- So if you only very rarely feel unsettled or anxious, please don't automatically feel too pleased with yourself!
- It might be that you are so unaware of the personalities and emotional needs of the people around you that you rarely consider them at all.
- It might be that you take it for granted so much that God is a God of love and therefore he wants the best for you, that you forget that he is also a God of righteousness and positive relationships and he wants you to live in creative giving relationships with the people around you, with his creation, and with him himself.
  - And let's face it, apart from Jesus, I've yet to meet someone who consistently achieves this.

- Let's move on to reality. The second basic stance about feeling anxious and unsettled.
- And this leads me to tell the joke that I tell every three years when this reading comes up
  - It's not the apple in the tree that was the problem, it's the pear on the ground.
- Because the unpalatable truth is that Adam and Eve were not content to live within the boundaries of true freedom. They wanted more. They wanted power. Knowledge. Self-fulfillment at the expense of the wishes of others. In this case God.
  - Do you notice how, once the serpent enters the fray, they objectivise God? Rather than talking to him, they talk about him. He becomes an object and their relationship with him is wounded. Listen!
    - *'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'*"
    - At no point in this narrative is God consulted, until it is too late.
- And they ate. And their relationship with God was mortally wounded because they suddenly realized their own vulnerability and they thought God might be cross. They realized they were nakedly defenceless so they tried to protect themselves, but sadly fig leaves don't offer much protection.
  - Think how unsettled the characters in this story must have felt. And with due cause!
  - When they felt unsettled they were acknowledging life and relationship as it had become. They were no longer in the true home that God had created for them. As a result of human sin and selfishness; of ambition and power; of desire to have what was forbidden; they were thrown out of the garden.
  - So feeling unsettled can well be an indicator that we need to repair relationship. With God. With each other. With his creation. Sometimes even with ourselves.
- Do you think feelings of not being in your true home, of being unsettled were something that Jesus was familiar with? Do you think this is how he felt in the wilderness?
  - On the one hand he was in God's created world. On the other that world was sinful. But on the third hand of our octopus like set of choices, that was his vocation. To come and be with us. To be one of us. To save us. It could be that feeling unsettled was one of the driving forces that helped him to fulfil his vocation. To irrevocably change the world, as a second Adam to the fight, as he once again gave us the warm possibility of a renewed, restored relationship with God.
- The basic temptation of Jesus in the wilderness seems to be the result of not loving God with a unified heart, at the risk of life, at the cost of wealth. Jesus was offered sustenance by changing stones into bread. A chance to prove his power by jumping off the top of the temple. Wealth, by worshipping Satan. But he turned it all down because it went outside the boundary of freedom that came with a perfect relationship with God.
- Of course he could do that, because his relationship with his Father was never marred in the first place. We are not in nearly such a good position. I'm not sure about you, but whereas I'm not often attracted by the prospect of throwing myself off the pinnacle of the temple, the first and third of the temptations would be highly likely to see me acquiesce. Just think of all the good I could do if I controlled the kingdoms of the world! So says the invasive, seductive false little voice in my head.
- But that is the glory of the cross. Jesus has conquered the power of the death that comes from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The death that results from sin. The death that comes from going outside the boundaries that true freedom brings because we are objectivising those around us,. His sacrifice for us, and God knows, it was a hefty price to pay, put humanity back into an unbroken relationship with God, and, if we allow ourselves to identify with Jesus, give him our burden of guilt and accept his new beginning.
- Does that help our unsettled lives? Well yes, and no! Like Jesus we have the sure hope, based on the word of God, and the relationship with Jesus we have in prayer and sacrament, that the ending is a positive one. We will eventually be living once again in the renewed creation, the Kingdom of God, the Garden of Eden.
- But at the same time, this has not yet fully come to pass, although with the eyes of Jesus through the power of his Holy Spirit, we can see glimpses of it in our world today. But as we are immersed in our all too obviously

sinful world, there will hopefully be many times when we do not feel at home. And that is likely to make us feel unsettled, as if we are not fully where we should be. We are truly walking through the wilderness of life.

- So if and when you feel unsettled, don't worry that is always going to be a negative emotion. Instead examine it, and see what the God of life and second chances is asking you to consider. And see if, with the support of Jesus Christ, that makes you more aware of how you react to the personalities around you and indeed the stunningly beautiful but endangered earth in which we live.
- And then, who knows, you may even identify with Jesus after his third temptation when *'the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.'*