

“Living with boundaries” a sermon based on Romans 5:12-19 preached at the evening service by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 6 March 2017, based on readings for the first Sunday of Lent relating to the temptations of Jesus.

Testing time for Jesus. The devil did not ask him to be someone he was not, but to go beyond who he was in God.

3 temptations to be more, to do more, to take more ...

To reach beyond our identity in God as if we need something more:

- More power
- More control
- More significance
- More influence
- More relevance
- More time
- More respect
- More recognition
- More money
- More support
- More what?

What do you imagine you need more of? Humility of spirit rests on accepting who we are in God. Resting in God.

Words spoken at baptism “You are my beloved, my chosen, my child, in whom I delight.”

A great temptation of our age is to live beyond our means, beyond our boundaries, because we can, and because we imagine we need more.

Our society sometimes imagines that freedom means we can do what we like. One of the readings for today is the story of Adam and Eve in the garden. It begins with an image of complete creation.

But even there, when they know freedom, when things are complete, the garden has its limits. God has placed a forbidden tree in the midst of bounty. This "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is the one thing the humans may not consume. And yet they do, almost at the first available opportunity. Why? Their ambitions outstrip their capacity. They want to be "like God."

It is a story about who we are as human beings. We count certain things as birth-rights. Electricity, air travel, tap water. For most of history, our present daily lives would be the stuff of fantasy.

Even for my parents, my father left school at 14 to work on the farm, and my mother had two years of secondary education, because that is all they could do where they came from.

Their first home was a small shack on the farm and the story is that when my father carried the first piece of furniture into the house he went through the floorboards.

Yet we have got so used to having things our parents and grandparents might have thought unbelievable. Our longing for more is coming at great cost.

When tempted by the devil, Jesus chose over and over again to accept his human limits. Create food from stones? Defy the law of gravity? Claim all riches? No, no, no.

Paul's letter says that we are of a type, Adam, and that there is another type, Christ, whose way reverses that of Adam. So Adam wanted and sought more. Christ was offered more and accepted limits.

For Paul, Adam was a 'type', a model of who we are, and a model of the one who was to come and share our human nature, Jesus Christ. Paul compares the effects of Adam's 'fall' with the effects of Christ 'raising us up'

The work of Christ is 'a righteous act' (verse 18), an act that puts right, that establishes the power to be raised up.

With Christ, we share in his resurrection and start to experience this power over sin in this life. Let me say a little about sin. This is what one writer says -

"We almost always hear talk of sin as a *moral* judgment. We imagine that admitting we're sinners is an acknowledgment that we've had bad thoughts, that we've done bad things. Not so. We are not called to be moral (by the standards and orders of our society). Sin is not the failure to live a good, clean life but the refusal to let God's goodness come alive in us for the good of others. Sin is whatever stifles or frustrates the fullness of joy in our neighbour's life. Sin is the unwillingness to take the risks that loving our enemies requires. ... Sin is not about our faults.

"Above all, by grace, we will remember during this season that we are *beloved*... we are called in the Beloved to enjoy God and to work with God for the good of the world."

Christ's death is alive in us; therefore, we can, again and again, in ways conscious and unconscious, die to ourselves. We can die to our ambitions. We can die to our judgments. We can die to our fears. We can die to our prejudices ... The wonder of it is, we find ourselves just by losing ourselves in care for our neighbour.

And we "come alive" just in the experience of dying to ourselves..."

Our identity with God enables us to live within limits, because, paradoxically, in that is our freedom, in not needing the more, in that is resurrection.

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growing in courage to live the Jesus way



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