

A new heart and spirit



Richard Greatrex *reflects on* Ezekiel 18:1-4. 25-end

Ezekiel is prophet to the Jewish nation in exile, but these exiles have become stuck in their thinking. They have taken God's words in Exodus 20:5 at face value – that if one generation displeases God then that displeasure will be meted out on their descendants and their descendants' descendants. The illustration about the sour grapes turns this into an excuse – it is futile for this generation to attempt to please the Lord, because God will continue to punish them for ancestral mistakes. All that is wrong is perceived as the fault of former generations.

In the missing section of our reading, especially verses 5-20, Ezekiel disputes this logic. Each generation is responsible for its own exploits. The wars of our grandparents' and parents' generations may have set up certain global political tensions, but that is no excuse for us not to work for a better future. The prophet closes by reinforcing his argument that each individual is responsible for their own actions. No matter what has gone before, the consequence of sinful behaviour is that we are cut off from God, and the consequence of righteous behaviour is that we are restored to God. Ezekiel urges his hearers to choose life, turn away from sin and actively pursue a new heart and spirit, because God wants us all to live fully but responsibly. ☺

Holy God, we thank you for giving us the freedom to choose to do your will. Renew our hearts with your gracious Spirit, that we might take our place as your children, working to build your kingdom. Amen.

Angels

Part II – the Garden of Eden

by Trevor Dennis

There are no angels in the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden. There is no need of any, for God puffs life into Adam and shapes Eve through mysterious surgery; the divine footsteps can be heard, and prayer is as natural as conversation. This is the being-with-God that we dream of. We dream of it, but for the most part we do not experience it. God

seems more remote, harder to hear, and prayer does not always come naturally. The Genesis story says so itself, for by the end Adam and Eve find themselves outside God's garden, and that is where we are, too. So we need go-betweens, angels ascending and descending, as they did for Jacob when he lay down to sleep at Bethel. Down-to-earth angels will do – people, music, animals or birds, that set us on a ladder leading to heaven.

We all have our angels. Thank God for them! ☺

“When He plans to plant a garden, He starts in the desert.”

Patricia St John (1919-1993), English writer and missionary

Grandparents' Day

by Caroline Hodgson

Happy Grandparents' Day! Grandparents come in all shapes and sizes – young and old, those we may not have had a chance to meet, those we are related to, and older people who just inspire and encourage us. Grandparents' Day is promoted by Age UK and aims to encourage people to celebrate grandparents. It's also an opportunity to highlight the needs of older people, who may be affected by loneliness, the crisis in care and a whole range of other issues.

But for all the challenges that grandparents and older people might face, there is plenty to celebrate. Everyone is a grandchild in one way or another, and you can get involved no matter what your own circumstances. So why not celebrate Grandparents' Day by giving a bit of thought, reflection and prayer to the generations that have gone before you? And there's no better way to celebrate Grandparents' Day than by committing to do one thing this coming week, no matter how small, to improve the life of a grandparent or older person. ☺