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**“LOVING GOD,
LOVING EACH OTHER,
LOVING BRACKLEY”**



**SHROVE
TUESDAY**



**LENT
2024**



Revd. Rob Wood writes.....

Grace Restores Nature

Lent will soon be upon us. Yes, you read that correctly! Like many followers of Jesus, perhaps you are someone who gives something up for lent. Fasting can help focus the mind on Christ and his sacrifice for us. That's certainly beneficial. However, we must remember an important truth. Lent should encourage us to flee sin and temptation, not nature. What am I on about? As you're not the first to ask that question, let me explain.

In any discipline, you can stumble across a sentence that acts as a summary of many wonderful truths. It stays with you and acts as a kind of lens through which to view various topics. I came across one such phrase that I have been chewing on for a while. Theologian Herman Bavinck helpfully states: 'grace restores nature'.

The relationship between nature (God's creation) and grace (the unmerited favour, gifts, and works of God) has important implications. Here are three big truths that come from this one pithy saying.

1. Creation is Good

Throughout her history, the church has wrestled with her relationship to the world.

Unfortunately, an impression is given that to be truly 'spiritual' one must step back from the world, which is perceived as bad (or if not bad at least second best), in order to step into the 'spiritual' realm. Perhaps that is why many are drawn to a monastic spirituality.

The famed Julian of Norwich, for example, lived a permanent life of solitude and seclusion from her cell connected to her church. Don't get me wrong, as an introvert, that kind of life sometimes has its appeal! But what drives people in that direction can often be unhelpful dualistic thinking. As a result, even today, the Church can be tempted to go into full nun and monk mode. This is one of the Churches' historic bad habits (I know that's a terrible pun!).

Of course, one may feel called to a more monastic life in God's kingdom. However, we are all called to affirm that God is the loving Creator and that his creation, although marred by sin, remains good.

This simple shift in mindset can have a seismic influence. Here are just two implications.

First, this phrase reminds us to resist dualistic thinking. There is no 'spiritual' part of us that is disconnected from the 'natural' part of us. God created the whole of you, body, soul, and spirit. The whole of you is to serve God with your whole life.

Second, let us remember the simple truth that God has given us creation to be enjoyed. We can thank God for family and friends, music and art, food and wine. Of course, you may choose to give something up for lent, but not because anything in creation is bad in itself.

However, we know that a good creation is only part of the story.

2. **Creation is Fallen**

Of course, something has gone wrong. Sin entered the world. Nature, therefore, needs restoration.

Sin, or evil more generally, has been seen throughout the ages as a privation. This is the implication that comes from the doctrine of a good creation. There is nothing in sin that gives it substance. It leeches of the good and corrupts it.

Why is this important to remember?

Well, as it is sin that detracts from who we are, it is through grace that we become more and more who we really are. Yes, to follow Christ is to take up your cross (Matthew 16:24). We die in order that we may live (Galatians 2:20). We are reminded of that this season of lent. However, paradoxically, this does not deny who we are. It is rebellion against God that detracts from who we are called to be. It is grace that restores. That's why this statement from St Irenaeus is so apt: 'the glory of God is a man [or woman] fully alive.'

3. **Creation is Being Restored**

Faced with growing secularism, the church can be tempted to retreat into itself. This leads one to ask, where is grace in relation to nature?

One may act as if grace is *above* nature. It is so easy to separate God's work from the world and think it happens on a higher, separate, super-spiritual level. The 'ordinary' in life must somehow be made sacred. There is also the danger of placing grace *alongside* nature. One can observe this in both theological fundamentalism and liberalism. For different reasons, God's work cannot be placed within the world and must have its own separate place carved out for it. In contrast to these missteps, I believe the call is to be wholistic. Grace permeates, restores, and glorifies nature. Jesus teaches that God's Kingdom is like yeast that permeates the world (Matthew 13:33).

This truth reminds one that the rule and reign of Jesus Christ will extend over all things. Famously, a brilliant theologian and former Dutch prime minister Abraham Kuyper said, 'there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, "Mine!"'.

Therefore, this pithy little phrase affirms that each of us has a role to play in God's kingdom. God wants lawyers and artists, musicians and cooks, educators and, dare I say, even politicians. Creation is good! The gifts God has given you are good. We are called to go into God's world and serve Christ's restoration project.

Maybe you are someone who likes to give something up for lent. That is brilliant. But let us all ensure we are not accidentally falling into any dualistic thinking. Grace really restores and will glorify nature.

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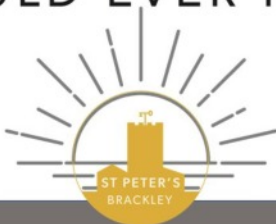
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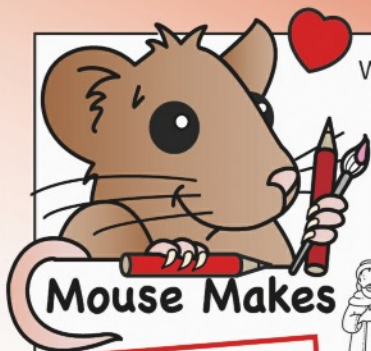
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Mouse Makes

Who were the first couple?

_____ and _____

Genesis 2:22-25

Who's wife became a pillar of salt because she disobeyed the angel's warning?



Genesis 19:26

Which of Laban's daughters did Jacob love?

Genesis 29:18

Who was Moses' wife?

Exodus 2:21

Who married Boaz to become King David's great-grandmother and a distant relative of Jesus?

Matthew 1:5

Which couple helped the Apostle Paul in his ministry?

and _____ Romans 16:3

FIND THE BIBLE VERSE

Change each letter in this bible verse to the letter **before** it in the alphabet.

XIBU HPE IBT
KPJOFE UPHFUIFS,
MFU OPU NBO
TFQBSBUF.

NBSL
UFO WFSTF
OJOF

DID YOU KNOW?

King Solomon had **700** wives! They were princesses of royal birth and he loved them all, but his wives caused him to turn away from God
See 1 Kings 11:1-3

E E Z R E E L I Z A B E T H R
S V Q S L R Z J I B O A D A M
R E B E K A H O J R A O Q N O
U I S A A C A S A A Z P R N S
T H A Q N H Z E C H A R I A H
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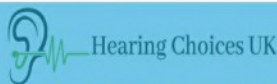
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Ruth and Naomi

In a place called Moab there lived a nice family. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons moved there because there was more food there than where they used to live. After a while Elimelech died but Naomi wasn't alone she still had two sons.

Her sons got married but after about ten years they died too. At least Naomi still had her sons wives to keep her company, their names were Orpah and Ruth.

Naomi called her sons wives and told them, "I am going to go back to where I used to live and I would like you also to go back to your family where you used to live. May God show you kindness as you have showed me." All the women cried and hugged each other because they were such good friends.

Orpah didn't want to leave Naomi but Naomi told her not to worry, she would be fine. So Orpah left to go back to her family. But no matter what Naomi said to Ruth, Ruth would not leave. "Don't ask me to leave. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your friends will be my friends and your God will be my God."

So Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem together. It was a good thing Ruth went with Naomi because Bethlehem was very far away and Naomi couldn't have travelled all that way by herself. Notice that Ruth never complains but is a good friend to Naomi. She wasn't expecting anything in return, she just wanted to help.

When they got there Ruth decided that she should do some kind of work. It was harvest time, so she worked in the fields following behind the harvesters and picked up any barley that they had dropped.

The owner of the field came by to greet the harvesters and noticed Ruth in the field. He asked one of the harvesters who she was. "She came back from Moab with Naomi, that's all I know." Lucky for Ruth the owner of the field was Boaz, he was a kind man who believed in God. He had also been related to Elimelech (Naomi's husband that died).

Boaz went to go talk to Ruth, he said to her, "Don't go work in any other field but stay here with the other servant girls. I will make sure you are safe and whenever you are thirsty go and get a drink from the water jars." When Ruth heard this she bowed down to Boaz and asked, "Why are you being so nice to me, I'm not even from here."

Boaz replied, "I know what you've done for Naomi, you left your family and moved to a place you've never been. May the Lord reward you for your kindness."

Ruth thanked Boaz and continued with her work in the hot sun. Boaz even ordered his workers to drop extra barley so Ruth could have more for herself.

Ruth took all the barley home and shared what she had with Naomi.

And eventually Ruth married Boaz and everyone was very happy!



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