



*East of Eden, but called home... following the way of the Cross*

When Adam and Eve left Eden, they departed to the East. After Cain murdered Abel, he went East into exile. As humanity migrated Eastward Babel was built - that symbol of human pride, self-reliance, confusion and division. When Lot separated from Abraham he settled to the East in the doomed city of Sodom. The expression *East of Eden* is a word picture of humanity moving away from God and headed for trouble.

A people who have lost sight of their inner compass, of a life that is grounded in love and stewardship of creation, about spending time with other as equals, God and human, man and woman, talking together in the garden in the cool of the day, with no separation.

As Cain moves East, in his attempt to re-find some sense of the community he has broken through jealousy and violence, he builds the first city in our scriptures, in our story of humanity. And so, all human civilisation is built upon the foundation of Cain's city, – built upon underlying violence and brokenness.

We see that underlying violence all around us in so many ways - in starvation in Gaza, occupation of Ukraine, oppression of all kinds of diversity, of zero-hour contracts, human trafficking, refugees, the human cost of war, of post-code lotteries, poverty and hunger. In the bullying tactics of some of our political rhetoric and policies, the misuse of power of many of the great corporations and governments. In wildfires, droughts, floods and the various results of the violence we humans have wrought upon creation, – more locally in the rising street violence in Lye, ever-growing use of foodbanks, the heartbreaking effects of rising drug use in Hasbury, and the ever more frequent sounding of horns and shouting of abuse on our streets...

We might feel helpless. We might feel that our little choices don't achieve anything. That humanity's compass is set ever Eastward – ever away from Eden, on a course of self-destruction that gathers all and everyone into its orbit and trajectory.

But, our writer from Hebrews reminds us, we have a choice, and we have the ability – in God – to go a different way.

Abraham went *WEST*.

After all those eastward journeys, Abraham goes west.

God calls Abraham to search for a city. He lived in Ur already – a large, sophisticated city. But Abraham was to search for a different kind of city. A new way of organising human society – as the writer tells us just before today's passage "the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God".

The heroes of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews were all continuing from this choice of Abraham's - all stones in the building of a new city on something other than violence and power, even if not all of them could see the part they played.

But it will not be built, can not be built, says the author, without the Cornerstone. The love that reaches backward and forward through time, across all space and all experience.

In Jesus, our Cornerstone, we learn what Love can look like in a human skin. Jesus who is both the pioneer – an explorer who sets out and

marks the way before us, and the perfecter – the goal itself. I am the Way, he says, and I will draw all people unto myself.

Jesus is our inner compass, who resets our trajectory. Jesus is the Love in which we can love, who returns us to the true way of being human together. The way of love for the little and the least, of wonder, of healing, forgiveness, trust and hope. The way that wrings resurrection from the torture of the Cross.

It's strange to read the God of Love calling for division and fire. But just as Abraham, and all the people in the letter of the Hebrews, had left so much behind that was familiar and safe – including family and friends; sometimes we are called in faith to insist on following that call of love. To love insistently may sometimes place us outside the trajectory of society, or even perhaps those close to us, but each time we stand against oppression and pain – we place a stone in the walls of the city of faith that will in time protect and restore the face of the earth. Including those that for a time we leave behind.

Cain's city was built on murder, but Jesus' on martyrdom. Jesus does not shed the blood of others, he sheds his own. Even when no one around him has a clue what he is doing, and his loved ones are actively trying to persuade him to take other routes, he breaks the cycles of violence and fear by refusing to be anything other than Love.

Jesus calls us in our gospel to see the signs of the times. Just as we respond to the weather and disaster forecasts - and put in place our defences and protections, or together head for the hills and the safe places – to look at the world around us with the rise in violence and pain and see the coming storms and take responsive action. Do we take as seriously the need to seek a new way of living, a new way of caring for our human sisters and brothers, for creation?

I was sent to bring fire on the earth says our Lord – fire, the source of protection, warmth and nourishment. Fire that cleanses and cauterises. Fire that catches from heart to heart and spreads like the flames from the Paschal Candle at Easter – kindling a world of hope and light right in the middle of darkness and fear and grief.

We have opportunities great and small everyday to make choices of love. Perhaps of where we shop, of brands we support, of small acts we can make toward better care of our creation. Perhaps to step out of cycles of grumbling, of gossip, of despair. Perhaps choices to respond to angry words, rude behaviours, the irritations and frustrations of others in community, by meeting them with forgiveness, grace, and boundaries that stop us being drawn into cycles of pain. Perhaps in hearing and truly listening – in responding to the needs and hurts that are sometimes the cause of those angers in our society. Perhaps to welcome the stranger, or those who are different to us. Perhaps in taking the opportunities that may present to make our voice heard for those who have no voice. Perhaps in an insistence on prayer in impossible seeming situations.

Perhaps even in laying down the spirals within ourselves of self-critique, and self-limitation – the scars of living in a world that has wrought violence upon our hearts.

And sometimes, like the heroes of our reading in Hebrews today, perhaps we don't see the part we play in the coming Kingdom. But we journey with faith, trusting in God, our inner compass. And it is on such faith that love, hope and peace continue through the centuries. It is through such hearts that God works in our world today.

Which way shall we journey?

Because we have a choice. Like Abraham. To go another way.

Let us set our compass home, with the company of witnesses to encourage us and the Pioneer, our Lord who marks the way before us. Let us, as Susan said last week, follow the Way of the Cross.

And let us together build a city of hearts of love, love that comes through justice of equal sharing, of loving in God's love, – a city about love and stewardship of creation, about seeing each other in the image of God, about walking and talking together, a city founded on Jesus Christ.

That it may encompass the whole of creation-

a "city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God".

