

Lent 1A (22 February) 2026 Art Deco Festival
Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11; Romans 5:12-19

Rebuilding better than before - Rev'd Dr Deborah Broome, Priest Associate

Today is the first Sunday in Lent – and it is also Napier's Art Deco festival. Many of us have come for vintage cars, dresses, jazz, and heritage; others because it's Lent. And some, like me, are here for both. We're going to hold those two things together, you and I, for we are entering Lent in a city that knows ruin and renewal. Napier today – in 2026, and particularly this weekend – is full of colour, music, architecture, and energy. But we know, don't we, that that joy exists because of a deep history of loss, fear, and rebuilding after the 1931 earthquake. And that actually fits with Lent. Lent often feels dark or heavy (the purple colour-coding might have something to do with that), yet its purpose isn't gloom – it's renewal, rebuilding, and returning to God. As Napier was rebuilt stone by stone, Lent is the season in which we allow God to rebuild us, truth by truth, grace by grace.

Today's readings started with Genesis. It's one of the best known (and perhaps least understood) stories in the Western world. This is a story not about ancient horticulture but about the human heart. It is, at its most profound level, about being human, and about the human pattern of curiosity, choice, and consequence. It's a story about God's relationship to humanity – to these beings that God created out of love and tenderness; it's a story about our choices and their consequences. It's not, of course, to be taken literally, as a piece of history about a couple who lived a long time ago somewhere between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. "Adam" back then wasn't a name but just a way of talking about human creatures being formed from "the dust of the ground," "Eve" means "the mother of all living." This is the story of something that's basically human and happens in all times and all places.

Adam and Eve are together in the garden, in the place where God's put them, when a serpent comes to hoodwink them. "Did God really say that, about what you can and can't eat? ... No, that won't happen, you won't really die – something good will happen in the end." It all sounds very plausible, but this is the voice of a crafty deceiver. The serpent's strategy is to plant doubt about God's goodness; to focus attention on what's missing instead of what's given. We see the first humans stepping outside the trust-relationship they were created for, that relationship between humanity and the God who created them. And immediately they feel shame and disconnection. When something goes wrong, in times of disaster, our first response is often disorientation – that Genesis moment of "their eyes were opened," that sudden awareness, feels familiar to those who've lived through something as devastating as the Earthquake.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus faces the same human realities – and he faced them in a wilderness that was just as barren, just as difficult, as Hawkes Bay after the Earthquake. Jesus' temptations echo that Genesis story: there's bodily need – his hunger; there's a need for safety and reassurance – throw yourself down from a high place to prove you're loved; there's a desire for power and shortcuts – worship the wrong thing so you can gain something. These are universal temptations, aren't they: to satisfy ourselves without reference to others, to demand guarantees, to take easier roads. Jesus, however, makes better choices than Adam and Eve did. He chooses not to listen to the deceptive voice dangling lies in front of him. He

chooses to rest in his relationship with God, chooses to hold on to his identity as God's beloved child. This season of Lent we're entering invites us back to our identity – to identity before activity, to who we are (or who we can be) in God, not to what we accomplish. I don't know about you, but I'm glad I don't have to achieve a bunch of wonderful things before I'm considered worthwhile: the truth is that we are immensely valuable to God, hugely loved by God, just as we are.

And then Paul, writing to the Christian community in Rome, moves us from the old pattern to the new one. He contrasts the old human story of mistrust with the new story in Christ. At the end of the part of the Genesis story we hear today Eve and Adam are a picture of human frailty: naked, vulnerable, distrusting each other, distrusting God. But in the part that comes after that, God clothes them, making garments of skins for each of them. And God builds on that, deepening that in and through Christ. Through one trust-broken act, sin – that's our human tendency to stuff things up – ripples outward; through one life of trust, Christ's life of trust, grace ripples outward even more. The grace of God, and the free gift in the grace of Jesus Christ, have come to many, for whatever choices we make in a day, the love of God is constant. Where humans break – ourselves, our lives, other people's lives – Christ mends. Where humans close their hands, Christ opens his. Where humans hide, trying to be somewhere else, Christ steps forward.

That's something to hold onto as we move through Lent. For Lent isn't about withdrawing from joy but about paying attention to what really matters. And at the heart of what really matters is the love of God. That's what surrounds us – and even when we forget this, as we sometimes do, God never forgets us. Even if you're not sure about God, even if you're still wondering what Lent might be, trust in that love. And may I gently offer some simple practices for the next few weeks: one moment of truth-telling a day, one moment of courage, one act of generosity (perhaps a phone call, a cup of coffee, a moment of listening), maybe one decision to trust God rather than fear.

This weekend's Art Deco Festival celebrates beauty, creativity, and resilience. Lent is about truth, renewal, and grace. Both of those grow out of honesty about human fragility. Anyone who's lived through a big earthquake knows only too well how fragile we are. But both Art Deco and the season of Lent honour the stubborn hope that rebuilding is always possible. Whether you're here this morning for Lent or for Art Deco – or both – you belong in a story where God takes what is broken and rebuilds with beauty and courage.

Christ doesn't undo Adam and Eve's story – he transforms it. Post-earthquake Napier wasn't restored to what it was – it was transformed. Napier became something new, something striking, resilient, and beloved. God's work in us is similar: it's not a return to innocence, but a journey toward maturity and grace. As Napier was rebuilt stone by stone, Lent is the season in which we allow God to rebuild us, truth by truth, grace by grace – into something beautiful. For God rebuilds better than before. Today, as we begin Lent while celebrating vintage cars, dresses, jazz, and heritage, there's an invitation. May that rebuilding grace be at work in all of us this season.