

## *Adam and Eve*

<sup>NRS</sup> **Genesis 3:1-7** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup> but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

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It seemed pretty obvious that if we were going to consider some of the major stories in the Bible in a chronological order, the next thing to talk about would be Adam and Eve and their temptation to eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil. It seems simple enough and it's a story that most Christians feel that they know. So, it came as a surprise to me that I really had to dig and wrestle with this text in order to shed some light on this passage.

In a well-known story like this, sometimes we find that much of what we think it says really isn't part of the scripture. (1) The man in the story is always referred to as "the man," meaning the dust-creature or mankind in general. Only later is Adam used as a name for a person. (2) The passage says nothing about Satan or the Devil. It only mentions a serpent, a snake, and says that the snake was a wild animal that God had made. (3) There is no apple. We don't have any idea what the fruit of this tree was. In fact, apple doesn't even make a lot of sense. Has eating apples ever given you a finer-tuned sense of what is good and what is evil? (4) The woman appears to add another rule about the fruit of the tree of good and evil. She is the only one who says that not only were they forbidden to eat the fruit, they were also forbidden to touch it! (5) The snake never lied to the woman. He said, "You won't die if you eat the fruit" – and it turned out that they don't die from eating it. (6) The woman was tempted by the tree. It was good for food, it was pretty fruit, and she wanted to be wise. So she ate. (7) The man was there the whole time. He never said a word, but he was there. There's a lot that many of us may have thought we knew or may have assumed, that isn't really supported by the actual text.

Some people have a bit of difficulty with this text, even as it stands. They think they see some inconsistency regarding whether or not the people could touch the fruit. They notice that after eating the fruit, the people don't die, as had been warned. The man and woman had a sense of visual beauty because we're told that the fruit was a delight to the eyes. So, it's a little quirky that they hadn't noticed that they were naked until after they ate! There are other hiccups when we read these ancient, pre-history stories as literal factual accounts. Over the centuries, that part of the world has been thoroughly explored, but no one has reported finding a garden where entry is denied by a flaming sword. People often wonder who Cain married after he was banned and sent off to another land. Some folks have a problem with the idea of a talking snake. And the past two weeks we've noticed that there are two accounts of creation that are quite different from each other.

What are we to make of all of this? This past week I ran across a passage that I'm pretty sure I had never read before. In the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel writes that God told him to speak to the king of Tyre and say to him, "Thus says the Lord GOD: You were the signet of perfection,<sup>1</sup> full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. <sup>13</sup> You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering . . . On the day that you were created they were prepared. <sup>15</sup> You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you. <sup>16</sup> In the

abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from among the stones of fire.” (Ezekiel 28:12 -13, 15-16 NRS) Did you hear the parallels with the story in Genesis three? You were in Eden, in the garden of God. You were blameless until you messed up, and then you were cast out of Eden. Here we have another story where someone was in the garden of Eden, but when they ceased to be blameless, they were forced out of the garden. We can't take both this passage in Ezekiel and the account in Genesis chapter three at face value. After they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the man and woman and their descendants are banned from the garden, but many centuries later, the king of Tyre was in Eden, the garden of God.

So, we need to move beyond a simple literal reading of Genesis chapter three. We need to take it very seriously, but not literally. When we try to confine the story to being an account of actual facts concerning an event at a particular point in time, we imprison the lessons that can be learned and pack them out of sight. It's time to look for the greater than literal meaning by taking this passage very seriously.

We're told that humankind began life in an idyllic garden, but something has gone wrong and we find ourselves living “east of Eden,” outside of peace and perfection. It's our condition today. The world is beautiful. We know that. Here at First Pres, once a year we remind ourselves just how lovely the world is with a series of beautiful slides shown during worship. At the same time, something isn't right. We also live in a world of pain and suffering. So what went wrong? We can read this as a story about disobedience and its consequences. God gave a command. People disobeyed. Punishment followed. That's pretty straightforward and simple.

There's more than disobedience involved. There was the desire to be like God, to elevate themselves to greater importance and power than was fitting. They tried to give themselves the position that belonged to God. So, it's also a matter of arrogance, of pride, of self-centeredness.

And, they failed to think for themselves. Both of them let the snake set the agenda. They uncritically accepted somebody else's ideas about how to behave and how to live their life.

All three of these weaknesses and faults are common all through history. All three of them get between us and God, weakening our relationship with our creator. All three of them have consequences that are painful. Disobedience brings consequences. Ignoring the law of gravity can get your leg broken. Ignoring the laws of the land can get you put in jail or fined. Ignoring the Ten Commandments will result in broken relationships with friends, family, and God. Your life will be more shallow, more lonely, and more painful in body and spirit.

Arrogance will drive away friends and family. Self-centeredness will eventually leave you lonely, unsatisfied, and with only your self-centered self as a companion. The saying that pride goes before a fall has stood the test of time.

And how often do we let other people do our thinking? How often do we blindly accept whatever we're told by political commentators or candidates? How often do we uncritically believe whatever is said in commercials? How often do we unthinkingly follow someone else's lead in how we spend our time, spend our money, dress, vacation, or eat?

Some have noted that we all venture into these possibilities as we grow up. At some point we become aware of the concept of opposites, yes and no, and eventually good and evil. We realize that we have choices. Two year-old children are known for discovering that “no” is also an answer. In discovering that we're individuals, we swing right into self-centeredness. It matters not that our parents are busy fixing supper – we want to eat NOW! As teenagers,, we usually become so involved in the process of socialization that we join in every trend and fad with our friends. One time, while on a congregational retreat, I watched my junior high aged daughter with a group of like-aged girls. They moved around the retreat center like a school of fish, darting this way and that, as if they were connected by invisible ropes, dressed much alike, and giggling in unison.

A well-adjusted person doesn't remain stuck in any of these moments in life. We hope that we've matured and that our children will mature. We become aware that we always have choices and choices always matter. We can seek God's will or ignore God and all of God's blessings. We can obey or disobey. We can be legends in our own minds, or celebrate the value of others. We can think for ourselves using the standards of love and compassion, or we can drift with the cultural tide and someday wonder why we're washed up on the sands of life and look back and see nothing that has any meaning.

The story of the man and woman, a snake, and a tree is so much more than a tale about two people, long, long ago. It's really about each one of us, a story that warns us that in the process of growing up we can stagnate or we can grow wiser.

We misread this story if we think of it as one bad decision that kicked Adam and Eve out into the cold, cruel world - and because of that one decision, everybody after them suffered the same unrelenting punishment. Although they were warned that they'd die, after disobeying, they didn't die. They experienced God's grace. They suffered some consequences, yes, but notice what else God did. God didn't kill them. God didn't desert them. A major message all through the Bible is God's unrelenting desire to have a relationship with human beings.

The whole thing about the fig leaves is a good example of God's continuing concern and care for these dust-creatures that are something of a pain. When the woman and the man realized that they were naked, they sewed fig leaves together to make loincloths. It's a pretty pitiful solution to nakedness. Fig leaves tear easily. They turn brown and brittle and crumble. Come winter, the supply of fig leaves disappears. But God made garments of skins for the man and woman and clothed them. It was a very kind thing to do, given the circumstances.

Brother and sisters, try to mind like good children of God. Try not to think too highly of yourself and become arrogant. Remember to think for yourself rather than numbly going with the flow. We all fail at these things on occasion. When we do, remember that God still cares about you and will replace your fig leaves with better clothes. Amen.

Sisters and Brothers,

Try to obey.

Don't get stuck on yourself.

Don't just float through life.

But when we fail at these things, remember that God is working  
on something better than your pitiful attempt to cover up!