

THE NOT-SO-ORIGINAL SIN

- OR -

WHAT'S SO ORIGINAL ABOUT SIN?

Sermon, March 5, 2017

Texts: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19

The Old Testament reading is one of the world's best-known stories. Everything in the Garden was beautiful and good. Adam and Eve were forbidden only one thing. There was this certain tree in the center of the garden, called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told Adam he could eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden ... *except* that one. Now, please note something that many (*but not all*) people of faith have apparently and inexplicably missed over the centuries ... *when* did God give this instruction? He gave it before the creation of the woman, before God formed the woman from Adam's side (*the original Prime Rib Special*). A plain reading of the text tells us Adam was given this instruction regarding the forbidden tree *before* Eve entered the human race. Now, hold that thought a second.

Chapter three begins, *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden ... or you will die.' 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"* I want us to note two things about this personification of evil, here ... or should I say this "reptilification" of evil.

First, we are told he is the most crafty and sly of creatures, which means he's pretty slick. There's a sermon in itself here, but don't engage temptation in conversation, don't spend time entertaining it, never try to outwit temptation ... because you usually won't win! The seduction comes when we get caught up in the dialogue with evil, when we linger there, when we look for some kind of rationale or excuse or theological ethic which will "let" us do what the temptation is tempting us to do, even though we really do know better. If Adam and Eve had only just walked away from this smooth Talker, human history could have turned out so very different!

Second, note the Tempter lies. In fact, Jesus later calls him *"the father of lies."* He tells lies we want to hear; why else would they be so tempting? *"You will not die; in fact, you will become like God!"* He's trying to plant the deceptive thought, *"God is just keeping something from you, and wants to keep you in your place."*

After all, who of us could resist such an offer, to be like God? Come to think of it, who of us has consistently, if ever, refused such an offer? Don't we like to play God? Don't we like being sovereign over our own lives? Don't we regularly inform God (*directly or indirectly*) how He should manage things? *"This is the way I see it, this is the way I think it ought to be, this is what I want to do and this is how I want to do it, never mind what God might say."* And aren't we often tempted to play God in our relationship to others ... controlling them, fixing them, trying to get them to fit our desires, attain our goals, serve our needs? I like the old story about three patients at a mental hospital. The first insisted he was Napoleon Bonaparte. The second asked how he knew he was Napoleon Bonaparte. The first replied, *"God told me!"* The third inmate responded, *"I did not!"* We laugh, but THAT is what is so original about this sin. This is not the Original Sin so much because it is the first one committed. It is "original" in that it is the sin *at our origins* where each of us goes wrong! This is at the root of all our sin; this is the origin, the root, of all our destructive activity. We are trying to *be* God rather than *trusting* God ... that's the origin of all sin. Whenever seduction draws us into thinking we know better than God, that leads to all kinds of mischief and destruction.

Now, back to that "thought" I asked you to hold earlier. There's something I shared when we last looked at this passage years ago that probably generated more affirmations and positive compliments from the women in this congregation than anything else I've said in my twenty years in this pulpit. Eve has been blamed since time immemorial for leading Adam into sin. But note how verse 6 reads: *"When the woman saw the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."* A plain reading of the story tells us Adam was right there with Eve when she encountered the serpent! Despite how this scene has been classically interpreted in art and literature, nothing in this text tells us Eve was alone. Adam was probably doing what so many husbands do, standing around quietly and allowing the wife to carry on all the social conversations. Now remember, as we read in the previous chapter, Eve wasn't in the world yet when

God told Adam not to eat of this Tree. Adam was given that directive *before* Eve was around. So, it's quite likely all she knows about this restriction is what Adam would have told her; she didn't get it directly from God, as did Adam. Yet now, when the serpent engages Eve in this temptation, Adam doesn't speak up, even though he is apparently RIGHT THERE! He does nothing to stop this; he stands mute while the Tempter engages his wife in this wily and seductive conversation. If Adam would have manned up ... and I don't mean in the gender-specific sense of the word "male," I mean if he just would have been a man, a human being created in God's image, a principled person of honor and integrity ... he would have lovingly and firmly stepped in and/or spoken up and/or just gotten them both out of there.

But, Adam is silent. He is dumb, in both senses of that word! And he apparently stays silent and watches as Eve takes the forbidden fruit and eats it. Remember, God told him he would die if he ate the forbidden fruit. It is only *after* Adam sees Eve is still alive that he takes a bite for himself! What a guy! Instead of acting like a good husband, instead of acting like a man of honor and integrity by protecting and loving and keeping his wife, Adam apparently uses her as a guinea pig, a food tester, to test God's command! Maybe he's thinking to himself, *"Let's see what happens to her, then maybe I'll try it."* (As someone commented after the worship service, *he's acting like the mob syndicate boss who lets his wife start the car every day!*) So, Adam was apparently more than just a secondary accessory to the crime; if anything, his guilt is greater! I'm convinced that's why Paul tells us in our Epistle reading that sin entered the world through *one man*, not through *one couple*. Eve may have been "deceived," as Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2, but Adam *deliberately chose* to disobey God. Seen in this light, his is BY FAR the greater guilt. You can read later in this chapter that when God later confronts Adam about this, Adam compounds his guilt by again doing what so many husbands do ... he tries to put the blame on his wife! (*verses 12ff*) Adam blames Eve, and Eve goes on to blame the serpent, and as the saying goes, the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on.

Seriously, though, I want to note just Who it is Adam tries to blame. It really isn't Eve. He blames God. He says to God, *"The woman You put here with me ... she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."* In other words, *"So, God, this is YOUR fault. You ordered up this Prime Rib special; if You hadn't made that woman and put her here with me, I wouldn't have sinned!"* No, Adam! Our sin is not God's fault. He gave you clear instruction, and you disobeyed. You defied Him. He has given all of us the divine capacity and gracious privilege to make real and free choices; we are given the very real rights and responsibilities of freedom ... and He has also provided us good instruction in His Word on how to choose what is right and good and life-giving. No, Adam, we aren't to blame God for *our* actions.

So as a result, they now knew good and evil, by first hand experience. More precisely, they now knew first hand the *effects* of evil; had they not taken of the fruit, they would have had the blissful life experience of knowing and experiencing only the good. There was something else the serpent had failed to tell them. They may know good and evil, but they would have a hard time knowing good *from* evil. Only God can do that, and we have to trust Him for that knowledge. They learned from bitter first hand experience that what initially appears good and beautiful and beneficial can, in fact, be really evil and ugly and destructive, and that what at first appears evil, can ultimately be good. But there is the heart of evil: it offers us a lie for the truth and portrays the truth as a lie, and we become lost in the quandary of choices we are not well equipped to discern. Sin always has the immediate effect of clouding our judgment. They wanted to play God. We, their children, have the same problem. As is the lot of children, we are plagued by our parents' issues.

There is a second garden of note in Scripture, a garden we will visit toward the end of this Lenten season. It was here in the first garden, here in Eden, where humanity first cried out, *"Not Thy will, but my will be done."* The second garden is Gethsemane, where a lonely figure cries out, *"Not my will, but Thy will be done."* Later, on a hill nearby, this Man hangs on a cross. Like the original Adam, He, too, is naked ... but He is not ashamed. In fact, He is in the process of taking care of our shame forever. He suffered on our behalf so we might be forgiven, and the curse of death may be removed. As we read from Romans, *"... just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."* In other words, through one man, Adam, sin and death entered the world, and we are heirs of that legacy. However, through another man, the second Adam, came victory over sin and death. By faith, we are heirs of that legacy as well. Jesus repeatedly faced the Tempter and did not sin. And on the cross, He gave Himself as a sin offering for us all. So now sin and death are no longer our only inheritance; we are heirs of life, eternal and abundant. What we commemorate each and every Lenten season is the suffering and passion of our Lord that allowed us to gain the best of both legacies ... inheriting the fullness of being made in God's image, and inheriting life, forever.

Thanks be to God for His great and gracious gift in Jesus Christ. Amen.