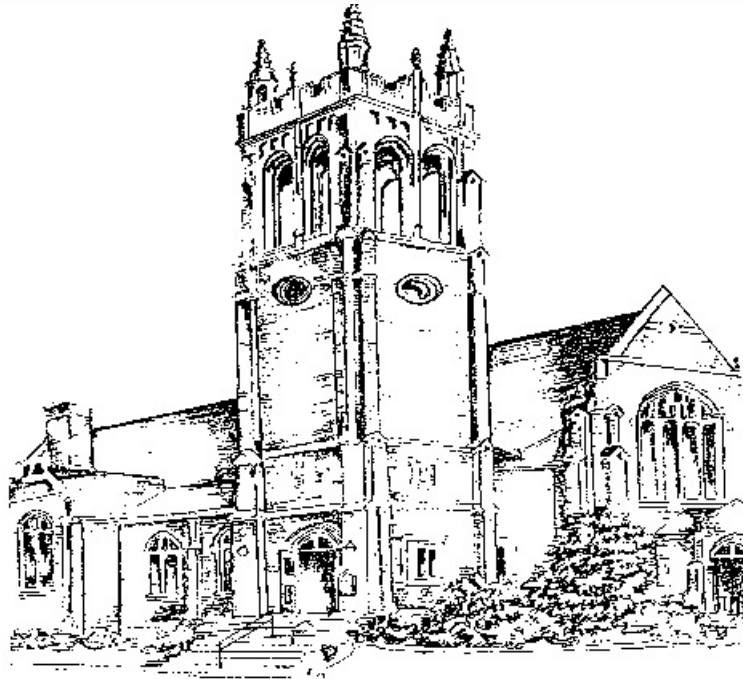


 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Genesis 3:1-24**  
**“A Tale Of Two Trees”**

February 26, 2017  
(8<sup>th</sup> Sunday After The Epiphany)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551

**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**GENESIS 3:1-24 "A TALE OF TWO TREES"**

Yahwist (1000BC), Gen. 2:4-4:16, ? = What's Wrong?

		<b>1) 3:1-6 EATING FORBIDDEN FRUIT: "KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL."</b>	<b>STORY FLOW</b>
1	Serpent	a Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild animal that the <b>Yahweh (the LORD)-God</b> had made.	NEW
	Woman	He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You (pl.) shall not eat of <i>any</i> <b>tree</b> of the <b>garden</b> ?'"	DISTORTION
2		b The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;	2:9, 16), REAL CHOICE
3		but God said, 'You (pl.) shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden <i>neither shall you touch it</i> , lest you die.'"	2 Round Dialog ANXIETY, EXAGGERATE LIMIT
4/5	a'	But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die./ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, <b>knowing good and evil.</b> "	DECEPTION, 22:12 NEW ELEMENT, KNOW ALL
6	b'1	So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,	AVENUES OF TEMPTATION: 1) Body
	2	and that it was a delight to the eyes,	2) Imagination
	3	and that the tree was desired to make one wise,	3) Intellect
	Man	she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.	<b>1) TRANSGRESSION</b> SILENT PARTNER, NO RESISTANCE, COMPLICITY, INNOCENCE LOST
		<b>2) 3:7 NAKEDNESS: CLOTHE THEMSELVES WITH FIG LEAVES (2 Events: See/Act).</b>	
7		Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.	2:25, SHAME + GUILT + FEAR 4:7, Sin, RUPTURE/ COVERUP On Our Own Now! Humor: Figs Itch!
		<b>3) 3:8-13 ALIENATION FROM GOD: ADAM, EVE, SERPENT.</b>	ALIENATION
8		And they heard the sound of Yahweh-God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh-God among the trees of the garden.	3 Questions + 3 Exchanges, EVASION
9	Man	Q1 But Yahweh-God called to <b>the man</b> and said to him, "Where are you?"	<b>2. INQUEST</b>
10		A1 And he said, "I heard thee sound of thee walking in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."	Near/Hide/Banished (Exit) FEAR +SHAME
11		Q2 He said, " <b>Who</b> told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"	No Inquest For The Snake Double Question
12		A2 The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."	<b>He Cannot Handle The New Knowledge</b> BLAME 1
13	Woman	Q3 Then Yahweh-God said to <b>the woman</b> , "What is this that you have done?"	Common Sin Split Them
	Serpent	A3 The woman said, " <b>The serpent</b> beguiled me, and I ate."	ISOLATION, BLAME 2
		Job 1, Zech. 3, (Wis. 2:24, Rev. 12:9, 20:2, Snake = Devil), Rom. 5:12-21	<b>3. SENTENCES</b>
		<b>3') 3:14-19 GOD'S THE JUDGMENTS: SERPENT, EVE, ADAM (Reverse Order).</b>	
14	Serpent	C3 Yahweh-God said to <b>the serpent</b> , "Because you have done this, <i>cursed</i> are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; <i>more cursed, more crafty</i> , No Dialog Here upon your belly you shall go, and <b>dust</b> you shall eat all the days of your life. Lev. 11:42, 3 CURSES	
15		I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."	Why Fear? (Prophecy of Messiah?) Why Snakes Crawl
16	Woman	C2 To <b>the woman</b> he said, "I will greatly multiply your toil in childbearing;/ in pain you shall bring forth children;/ yet your desire shall be for your husband;/ and he shall rule over you."	4 Why Kids Hurt All Relationships Disrupted
17	Man	C1 And <b>to Adam</b> he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' <i>cursed</i> is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;	Longest Why Men Sweat At Work
18		Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat of the plants of the field.	
19		In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; You are <b>dust</b> , and to <b>dust</b> you shall return."	Why All Die? 2:7, ULTIMATELY DEATH p.w., Adam/Adamah (ground, Dusty), God Stays In Relationship
		<b>2') 3:20-21 NAKEDNESS: GOD CLOTHES THEM WITH SKINS (Death/Blood).</b>	
20		The man called his wife's name <i>Eve</i> , because she was the mother of all living.	<b>MERCY OF GOD 1, 2</b>
21		And Yahweh-God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.	
		<b>1') 3:22-24 NOT EATING THE TREE OF LIFE: "KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL."</b>	DIVINE COURT
22		Then Yahweh-God said, "Behold, the man has become like <i>one of us</i> , <b>knowing good and evil</b> ;	TRUE, NO RETURN
		and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the <b>tree</b> of life, and eat, and live for ever"-	2:9, 6:5 (escalating)
23		therefore <b>Yahweh-God</b> sent him forth from the <b>garden</b> of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.	
24		He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.	NO WAY BACK, ONLY FORWARD FALL DOWN/OUT? ETERNAL LIFE

## A TALE OF TWO TREES

*“You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

Our humble origin and our humbling demise.

**I**ron Eyes Cody was a Sicilian-American actor who once did a famous TV spot for the *Keep America Beautiful* campaign after a career of playing Native Americans in the movies.<sup>1</sup> He was 67 at the time, rugged and wrinkled. It first aired on *Earth Day* 1971 and is now judged one of the hundred most effective ads ever. Cody, dressed in buckskins and looking the part, was drifting alone down a river in a canoe. As he saw our waters being polluted, a closeup showed a single tear roll down his cheek, telling the whole story. In 1988 Cody repeated an old Indian legend in *Guideposts* magazine. Here is his retelling:

“Many years ago, Indian youths would go away in solitude to prepare for manhood. A young man once hiked into a beautiful valley, green with trees, bright with flowers. There he fasted. On the third day, as he looked at the mountains, he noticed one tall rugged peak, capped with dazzling snow. ‘I will test myself,’ he thought. He put on his buffalo-hide shirt, threw a blanket over his shoulder and set off. When he reached the peak he stood on the rim of the world. He could see forever; his heart swelled with pride.

He then heard a rustle at his feet, and looking down saw a snake. Before he could move, the snake spoke. ‘I am about to die. It’s too cold for me up here; I am freezing. No food, and I am starving. Put me under your shirt and take me down to the valley.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I am forewarned. I know your kind. You are a rattlesnake. You will bite, and your bite will kill me.’

‘Not so,’ said the snake. ‘I will treat you differently. If you

---

<sup>1</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron\\_Eyes\\_Cody](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Eyes_Cody). The commercial can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7OHG7tHrNM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7OHG7tHrNM).

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 4**

do this for me, you will be special. I will not harm you.’

The youth resisted awhile, but this was a very persuasive snake with beautiful markings. So he tucked it under his shirt and carried it down to the valley, and there he laid it gently on the grass. Suddenly, the snake coiled, rattled, and struck, biting him on the leg. ‘But you promised...’ he cried.

‘You knew what I was when you picked me up., said the snake as it slithered away.’<sup>2</sup>

The theme of *talking snake meets naive youth* is widespread in folklore.<sup>3</sup> People love talking animal stories, because we all wonder as we look at our dogs and cats, “What would they say if they could speak?”

Fables and legends, myths and yarns, children’s stories and sacred stories of origins are ways to deal with things too deep for simple realism or straight forward history. Life is mysterious, and so the wise compose stories of brave quests and mystical mountains and talking snakes, of magic gardens where nakedness is not problem but a gift of innocence, of worlds of bliss and plenty and creative work and afternoon walks with the garden owner to give progress reports and receive new assignments, of choices to make and commands to heed, of the promise and peril of the gift of freedom used and misused, of great trees at the center as living symbols of two paths, and yes, even of talking snakes who slither in and out of consciousness and of terrifying angelic creatures whose mysterious flaming swords prevent our return to a world we can never experience unless it comes to us again from the future.

There’s no return to an ideal earlier state and no way back to the past, so what is life’s direction? It’s a long march east of Eden through a messy, dangerous world where nothing works as it should and where in the end— when

---

<sup>2</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Genesis 3:1-24.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald A. Veenker, “The Fabulous Talking Snake,” in G. Scorgie, M. Strauss, S. Voth, editor, *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God’s Word to the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), [www.academia.edu/6871389/That\\_Fabulous\\_Talking\\_Snake](http://www.academia.edu/6871389/That_Fabulous_Talking_Snake).

---

life runs out in the valley of the shadow– we return to the dust from which we came with the fruit of the tree of life as a final hope. This is us and our world.

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

The story before us is Genesis 3, often called *the story of the fall*. But the word *fall* is not used in our story; the story is not about a tumble from a height but a forced exit, an eviction for cause, a banishment. Nor is the diagnostic word *sin* used, through the story says much about its entry and unpleasant outcomes. Instead it speaks of good and evil, naivete and the loss of innocence, the deceptions of temptation, the consequences of disobedience, the mercy of a God who guarantees the grand continuities of life, and it gives reasons for all sorts of observable phenomena like, Why do we wear clothes? And where did the feelings of guilt and shame come from? And why is it so easy to go wrong? And why such conflict between the sexes? And why does labor hurt? And why do women have more than one child? And why do husbands rule wives? And why are we so afraid of snakes? And why does it take so much toil and sweat to make a farm work, and why do we die, and is there hope?<sup>4</sup> All this in twenty four verses in six carefully balanced paragraphs, so at a minimum give the author credit as a literary and psychological genius because few stories have had the impact of this one, and it was already a thousand years old when Jesus came on the scene to begin the great work of undoing all the effects of Genesis 3: of sin and of evil and of death: our three biggest foes.

Jews and Christians claim this as a universally true story about God and people, which is why it’s in our Book of Origins, which is what the word *Genesis* means and why it starts as it does, “In the beginning...” It’s foundational. It’s bed rock. It provides us a true orientation, because- as we know- God remains unchanged in character, but something is wrong with our world and with each of us, something so deep and embedded and gnarled and perverse and dark that none of us can fix it with great ideas and heroic programs of self-reformation or political revolution; only God is big enough and wise enough and loving enough to resolve and heal it. Everything is out of sorts; it

---

<sup>4</sup> These are known as *etiological* stories, i.e. stories of origins. One of my favorites is: Why do vines cling to trees? Answer: Because they are afraid.

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 6**

hurts and it never quits. It is the long groan and moan of human history, and God’s surprising remedy is to show up at ground level in the person of Jesus the Son, not as a quick fix but a true one that will end with the ushering in of God’s kingdom to remake all that is and us along with it in amazing new resurrection bodies just like our amazing Lord.

I suspect that when first read in public sometime around the time of King David, the hearers of were deeply stirred, and many thought to themselves, “This is true. This is a window into the ways of the Lord our God. So let us preserve and copy it for generations yet unborn.” There was once a single original, hand written in Hebrew, and now how many? That this story is so full of insights as to never be exhausted is a hint of its depths, which I attribute to divine revelation. This is a story from God, given for our benefit, so that when some soul asks, “What’s wrong?” we can reply, “Let me tell you an old story, and then let’s explore it together.”

Once upon a time in a desert oasis, life was relationally rich and deeply good. The basics were all in place: life, freedom, food and drink , a place to call home, a complementary couple naked and naive in their enjoyment, a stable natural environment, physical work that was not yet toil plus the intellectual work of naming and tending the animals. And to cap it off a morning and evening stroll with the Lord to review the learnings of day in conversation as the cooling breezes began to ruffle the date palms as the sun rose and fell. They were not yet immortal, but they were fully and delightfully human, limited yet unspoiled and in sight of the tree of life. Life was whole and free, and the whole was good to bone. Only one limit as a reminder of who was Creator and who Creature and with the limit came a warning, “If you eat thereof, you will die.” It was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree whose fruit gave knowledge of everything, and its name presumes that evil was not just a possibility but in some sense an already realized fact, though at this point still hidden from the primordial couple for whom everything they experienced was simply good; it’s all they knew; it was their world.

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 7**

The pain of Adam’s loneliness had been cured,<sup>5</sup> and *Dusty*— for that is what his name means- now had a woman, and so every morning when she first opened her eyes, he sang to her in a rich, soulful baritone the great love song of *The Four Tops*, “Ain’t No Woman Like The One I Got” and when she asked, “Sing me another,” he rolled right into the Gene McDaniel’s classic:

“He took a hundred pounds of clay  
And they He said ‘Hey, listen  
I’m gonna fix this-a world today  
Because I know what’s missin’  
Then He rolled his big sleeves up  
And a brand-new world began  
He created a woman and-a lots of lovin’ for a man  
Whoa-oh-oh, yes he did...  
With just a hundred pounds of clay.”<sup>6</sup>

And that, my friends, is where the South Carolina Shag began, not at O.D. or the old Pawley’s Pavilion, but back in the garden of Eden with Dusty wearing khakis, a madras shirt, and loafers with no socks. And how do I know that? Because when I take Lori’s left hand and launch into my best moves to *Mustang Sally*, something so rich and good is being enacted that it must have been there from the very start. I know no other way to explain it. All the great loves songs of the crooners and the rockers are just extended commentaries on the early chapters of Genesis before the great catastrophe struck, before Venus and Mars fell out of alignment, before the battle of the sexes began with all its devastation of promises broken and homes busted and love betrayed.

But then a visitor showed up at the dance, a sneaky snake, a lounge lizard, clever and quite an interviewer as seen in the form of his questions. Some claim the serpent approached the weaker party first, the woman as the doorway of temptation and only then the stronger man. Others say the proof she was the stronger one is that at least she put up some resistance, whereas Dusty

---

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:18-24.

<sup>6</sup> [www.songlyrics.com/gene-mcdaniels/a-hundred-pounds-of-clay-lyrics](http://www.songlyrics.com/gene-mcdaniels/a-hundred-pounds-of-clay-lyrics).

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. . . . . 8**

caved without a word of moral protest. But the fact is that the story shows some evidence of an even-handed approach: she the first to bite, he a willing accomplice; Adam the more thoroughly interrogated, the woman less so. So the only answer as to Who's to blame? is *Both, though in different ways*, and as I have come to see: *men and women sin equally, but we often sin differently*, an argument that our differences are not just cultural but hard-wired with a purpose, that the differences are not a case for discrimination nor the complementaries an endorsement of sameness but of a brilliant mutual and honorable interdependence full of mystery, human persons both, but designed for fruitful complementarity at every level: physical, psychological, intellectual, and not simply interchangeable as if they were sames. The current cultural fad of gender-blending goes against the deep grain of creation and is bound to frustrate because it is finally unworkable.

So a fateful conversation began, and as one would expect from a clever snake, it started with an open ended question with a spin. Rather than focus on God's generosity, that all the fruits tree were permitted for food save one for the sake of obedience as a protection, the question was framed as, "Did God say, 'You together shall not eat of *any* tree of the garden.'" How subtle. No, that is not what God said. So the woman's answer is correct except for one expansion. God said nothing about not touching, just not eating, so to avoid a violation we will add a restriction because of our anxiety about death. We will not eat; *we will not even touch*. We will add to God's Word a safety zone, and that may have been the first move towards a slippery slope of deception, mistaking a human restriction for a divine prohibition, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden," but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of tree which is in the midst of the garden, *neither shall you touch it*, lest you die." Thus ends round one of the debate between the naive woman and the serpent. She's being probed with leading questions, as in a skillful cross examination. And so far she's doing quite well for first timer.

In round two, however, Sneaky Snake up the ante considerably and reveals his intent. He contradicts God's warning, "You shall not die," and then attributes bad motive to God. He's holding out on something, not giving them the full story, "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." In other words, "God is a

---



**Genesis 3:1-24. . . . . 9**

liar and guarding something good, something you can gain if you listen to me.” You can see how the later Christian tradition saw sneaky snake as an image of the devil,<sup>7</sup> or at least as the character through whom his temptations came.

Now if what God desires are human image bearers in two models, male and female, with free will in order to make genuine personal responses and not as pre-programmed robots, that comes with the risk of freedom being misused. There some things even God cannot do because they are contradictions and therefore not rational but absurd. God cannot make a square circle, a rock he cannot lift, a married bachelor, or a free person who is at the same time determined. And if, within the limits appropriate to creatures, we have libertarian freedom, meaning the ability to choose A or B without prior restraint, then our choosing wrongly and setting our will against God is a risk God takes.

It was also a risk God took with the angels, and so one possibility to explain that evil already exists and has found a voice in the serpent is that just such a rebellion has taken place in the angelic realm and is now about to be spread to earth to infect it with treason. The gift of freedom, in both its right and wrong uses, is a powerful thing, able to change angels and people and worlds.

And the basic issue is trust, isn't it? Shall the woman freely trust God's character and words, or shall she shift her trust and hope to the sly serpent and the one who stands behind his alluring appeals, "I care for you and your good and your growth more than God." Ever heard those voices in your head? I have. But this time she makes no verbal response, no protest as before. She is now in the throes of a powerful illusion. Her appetites are stirred, "And when she saw that the tree was good for food;" her imagination engaged, "and that it was a delight to the eyes," and her lust for forbidden knowledge energized, "and that the tree was desired to make one wise," she violated first her own boundary, "she took of its fruit," then God's, "and ate." All her faculties— her body, her imagination, and her intellect— are under the mesmerizing sway of the lie and what it promises for them both, "and she also gave some to her husband," who was likely standing silent during the conversation, "and he ate." Life changed.

---

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 20:9, 20:2; Wisdom 2:24.

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 10**

In a classic *Twilight Zone* episode from 1960, an American on a walking trip through central Europe gets caught in a raging storm. Staggering through the blinding rain, he chances upon an imposing medieval castle. It's a hermitage for a brotherhood of monks, and the reclusive brothers reluctantly take him in.

Later that night, the American discovers a cell with a man locked inside. An ancient wooden staff bolts the door. The prisoner claims he's being held captive by the insane head monk, Brother Jerome, and pleads to be released.

The prisoner's kindly face and gentle voice win him over. The American confronts Jerome, who declares the prisoner is none other than Satan, *the father of lies*, held captive by the Staff of Truth, the one barrier he cannot pass. This wild claim convinces the American that Jerome is indeed mad. As soon as he gets the chance, he releases the prisoner- who immediately transforms into a hideous, horned demon and vanishes in a puff of smoke!

The stunned American is horrified at what he's done. Jerome responds, "I'm sorry for you, my son. All your life you will remember this night and whom you have turned loose upon the world."

"I didn't believe you. I saw him and didn't recognize him," to which Jerome solemnly observes, "That is man's weakness and Satan's strength."<sup>8</sup>

I admit that Rod Serling and the stories he told terrified me as a boy, still I was drawn to them, mysterious and supernatural. This one is clearly a modern variation on the story before us today, and it shows just how subtle is temptation and how easily we are deceived by one much smarter than all of us. And when our freedom is used to distrust rather than to trust and obey, it is we who pay the price, and the effects are immediate. And note that these are not the judicial punishments which come in the next scene, but built into the transgression itself. Innocence vanished, "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves aprons," to which the first listeners would have smiled since they knew how itchy figs leaves are to tender flesh. And so the great cover-up and blame game begins. To feel both exposed and ashamed is a toxic brew of emotion, and how horrible it must have been for this innocent pair who had never known such feelings coursing through them like poison. The most basic relationships of life were cracking: with themselves, with one another, with their Maker.

---

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Stump, "Is the Devil Dead?" *The Plain Truth*, (Mar/Apr 2001).

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 11**

Now when God asks questions, he's not after information. It's a parent asking a first grader, "Tell me about your day," after they've already gotten a call from the principal. And so the inquest begins. It's time for their next appointment with the Lord, but today is different. At the sound of God's nearness they hide in fear, "Adam, where are you?"

His answer is a pitiful as it is honest, "I heard the sound of you walking in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of tree which I commanded you not to eat?"

"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." So now the truth is out in the open. Adam has come clean, even if it's tinged with a hint of blaming God and the woman for his foolishness.

Likewise the woman in her interrogation, "What is this that you have done?" again not to gain information.

And her answer is as honest as her mate, but again with a shift of responsibility to the snake's Maker, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." boundary set for their good has been crossed, and now all is different.

In autumn 2002, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, a priceless 15th century marble statue of Adam toppled and shattered while no one was in the room. Though vandalism was suspected, curators determined the life-sized Venetian sculpture "buckled of its own accord." The director said, "It will take a great deal of time and skill, but the piece can be restored," the museum's director said.<sup>9</sup> That's us. We buckled of our own accord, and it will take time and skill for us to be restored, and that, friends, is the long, complicated, multi-layered story the Bible preserves and within which we live.

The gift of freedom and the power of choice is part of the image of God impressed in us. It's a risk to give us such capacity and for God to preserve it in us across our lives, and the most basic issue remains, Whom shall I trust? To whom shall I be loyal? To the God who made me and knows me and loves me, or shall I follow other, smoother voices that make me doubt God's word and question God's character and impugn God's motives?

---

<sup>9</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Genesis 3;1-24.

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 12**

You know the other voice as well as I do. It has access to our thoughts and is highly skilled at exploiting our weaknesses. And this means that every one you meet, including those closest to you, are fighting a fierce inner battle every day. Underneath the surface appearances of life a battle is raging; we are the prizes, and our thoughts are the battleground. And this means vigilance towards ourselves and compassion for others. How many times my initial negative judgments towards people have been corrected when I took time to listen to their stories. I did not know what they were up against or how far they'd come. The pair in the story before us are not just figures of long ago, they are us! This is our story, and some variation of it is repeated in every life.

One of the scholars I read this week showed me a pattern I'd not seen before, that underlying Genesis 3 is a judicial format in four parts: 1) a temptation and transgression; 2) a formal inquest and determination— thus the *Where? Who?* and *What?* questions to the human pair as if before a grand jury; 3) the passing of just and varying sentences, but it does not stop there because of the nature of the judge. The last part is 4) the demonstration of mercy.<sup>10</sup>

There is both an *intrinsic effect* of sin as a breach of trust leading to a transgression and an *external effect*, which is what the three sentences of vv.14 through 19 are about. The internal effects for Adam and the woman are guilt and fear, shame and hiding and excuse making, a loss of the bliss of innocence. The external effects for the first couple is that their lives will now be much harder, more painful than before, and will end in death. The sentence upon the serpent, however is of a different kind. He did not change his character in the story as they did, becoming sinners; rather, he revealed his evil nature in leading them astray with distortion and deception. And so he is the first sentenced. This creature and the one he symbolized is cursed as the lowest of all. The woman is not cursed, nor the man, though the ground he tills is; on the snake alone as a creature is a curse pronounced. The lowest of all. The most hated. An image of the constant relations between humans and serpents is that he strikes our heel as a viper, and we in turn crush his head with a rock or a club.

I remember the first time I killed a poisonous snake. It was in the summer,

---

<sup>10</sup> Fretheim, *Genesis*: 359.

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 13**

and a copperhead was at the edge of the flower beds. My father told me to go get the hoe, and I did. And rather than him doing it, he told me how to do it. Not to get too close but to take aim and bring the blade of the hoe down just behind the head, which for a ten year old was quite a calculation. It felt like an epic battle between some cartoon super hero and a great evil dragon, or so I remember it a half century later. And I did it with a fierceness that startled me. The descending blade severed the head; I then watched with amazement as the body continued to writhe and contort for what seemed a very long time. I was told not to handle the head as the fangs were still there. So much adrenalin was now flowing I felt exhilarated and wondered if there were any others nearby on which I might inflict a final heroic blow. I was then instructed on the differences between snakes; we wanted to leave peaceably with green and black and king snakes, but not with rattlers and moccasins and copperheads. It was one of the learning moments you never forget. I felt as if I'd won some great victory and protected the family from harm. Where was my crown? Where was the fair maiden and the cheering crowds? The great and evil dragon has been slain by the young price, Philip the Fearless! Overblown? Of course, but that is part of what boyhood is about, little victories and big dreams. And poor is the man who has forgotten such dreams and been tamed and caged.

Little did I realize I was not only enacting the ancient enmity between humans and serpents but that at deeper level the greatest victory of all, the very tipping point of human history. In the light of the fullness of all Jesus was and did, and in the new light afforded by his resurrection, the church reads the Old Testaments and find all sort of new connections, and so in verse 15 many have seen the very first promise of Jesus' victory over Satan, that Jesus will have his heels pierced with Roman nails as he enacts his victory over evil and the Evil One in his cross and resurrection, to take all that poison into his own body and then be shown the victor in his mighty resurrection, "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

It took an outside influence, a tempter, to inject the venom of distrust and willing disobedience into our naive souls, and one day he will be dead and we shall be free. Jesus has struck him a deathblow, but just as with my copperhead, he is still writhing and in rage spreading all the fear and chaos he can. The prayer Jesus gave us, "but deliver us from evil," he shall one day fulfill.

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 14**

The judgment upon the woman is increased pain in the labors of birth, and this is something men may observe but never full understand how a woman descends into a process over which she has no control and how near to death she comes to bring forth new life. You'd think that after one she'd be done with her husband once and for all, but desire returns, and with it the possibility of more children. "Yet your desire shall be for your husband," and then this crowning power differential, "and he shall rule over you," the name for which is *patriarchy*, and it is the way domestic relationships have been structured for most of history. No longer is there the sweet intimacy of equality and mutuality but a bias towards control and restriction, even violence.

And so when we in recent modern times have sought, both in law and in enlightened domestic relationships, to recover the benefits of equality and an egalitarian model, two things are to be noted. Men controlling wives is a result of our joint betrayal of the Lord, one of the effects of sin we are to resist; and secondly, that progress will be difficult and uneven since we are seeking to reverse a very long and deep pattern. Even a glance at the differential treatment of women and girls in the Islamic world will convince you of this. Wherever the good news of Jesus goes, the lives of women and girls are greatly improved over time, even to the point where law and expectations change radically, as in our day. And where the idea that Jesus died and rose for all is resisted, there you will see the old patterns in full force and much resistance to change.

Now for Adam the sentence is also customized, as with the serpent and the woman. He is now a subsistence farmer, and it takes great effort to draw even a minimal crop from the fields. The free abundance of Eden now gives way to fields of weeds and thistles, to much sweat and back-breaking toil just to feed a family. Babies hurt, and now farming hurts. Her belly aches, and so does his back. Now listening to your wife is normally a good thing, and the truth is that when I listen to Lori's hunches and intuitions, my life goes better, simply because her God-given spiritual radar is so much more sensitive than mine. But here is noted the fact that in a moment of moral crisis, when all was literally at stake, Adam did not *man up* and fill the gap by resisting evil. He folded.

There is the possibility of a moral corrective in marriage, that when one is weak and tempted, the other may be strong and courageous and come to their

---

**Genesis 3:1-24. .... 15**

aid, but in a moment of opportunity, Adam failed without a single word of protest. And to this day, when men do not *man up*, when they do not stand firmly in private and in public for what is good and true and noble and right, when they become couch potatoes and drunkards and sorry and philanderers and non-supporters, everyone suffers, particularly women and children.

One of my fears as a citizen is that we only have one cultural institution left that has a track record of producing men who can *man up* to their duties, and that is the military, and in recent years we have so over-worked and exhausted them, they are now depleted. Who will help misguided and confused men to discover the high call of being a good man, a faithful and honest man, a worker, a protector, a reliable husband and father? Is this not the deep crisis in our culture, and how can the church be part of the answer? Simply by calling men without apology to become followers of Jesus Christ and – in his company– to relearn what it means to be his kind of man. Strong and tender in the right places. Fierce and firm in the right places. Willing to serve others as Christ served us. And this is the kind of manhood women and wives need not fear because it is chastened by Christ and willing to suffer for the good of others.

Adam was called out by God for his spineless consent, for his cowardice and lack of love for his wife who was deep in the throes of an all out moral assault; and whenever a man does not speak up and stand up and man up, the flaw is repeated and the damage extended. In my gallery of my mind there is a personal wall of shame and a wall of fame, the wall of fame marked by those times when I sucked it up and manned up for the sake of Christ, and the wall of shame by those times I was called and did not because it was just too much trouble, and I was a coward. And when I glance at one wall my heart swells with gratitude, and with the other only regret and loathing. And I suspect that every man here has such a gallery.

We have now seen the temptation and transgression, the formal inquest and findings, the just and customized sentences, but at the end a surprise, not rejection but the continuing of a relationship and the gift of sustaining mercies for the long, difficult journey ahead. It does not end with the words, “You are

---

dust, and to dust you shall return.” There are two paragraphs yet to read.

The naming of the woman as Eve is saved to this point in the story. Naming the animals was an intellectual and zoological task given to Adam in the days when all was well. But Eve is not recorded as being named because she wasn't there yet. Also, she is different from the others, a creature but not a beast, his equal and complement and fulfillment. And secondly, to placement shows that the call to name things properly and thus understand and appreciate them is still in force. So Adam the co-sinner, bestows upon the woman a new name; she shall be *Eve*, the first mother of all the living. Life is now wounded and infected with sin and evil; life is great diminished and pain constant, but the generations continue.

The second great mercy is that God kills animals and as divine tailor drapes the vulnerable pair in more fitting and durable garments for life outside Eden. It is the first sacrifice, the first time one dies for the benefit of another, and so another subtle clue of the final sacrifice that will finally clothe us in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The third mercy, and perhaps the greatest of all, is that we are forever banished from a spoiled Paradise, shoved outside, never to return, the entry now blocked by fearsome angelic cherubim, all fire and blade. And why, we ask, is that such a great mercy? Because, within the symbolic logic of the story, if we were to eat of the tree of life in our current state, we would be sinners forever and ever and ever, and what a misery that would be because that is precisely what hell is, to sink deeper and deeper into the realities of sin and evil forever, and so God banishes us from that awful possibility.

We will not always be as we are now. The long march of history begins with a man and woman walking out of a memory and towards a destiny, clothed in skins and the promise that the great and good God is still with them. This is us; this is our world. And so when you hear someone say, as we do these days, “It is what it is!” you now know the back story and the why. “Yes,” you may reply, “but there is more!” The inspiration of this story is that it never quits speaking. So what have you seen today?

---