

Sunday, February 27, 2022

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

Betrayal and Redemption -from Darkness to Light

Part 1: Eve's Dilemma

Genesis 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

Because next week is our Youth Group Mission Trip service and next Sunday is ALSO the first week in Lent, I thought it good to start our Lenten sermon series a week early. The first week begins with the very first story of, ***Betrayal and Redemption*** taken from Genesis, chapter 3. I thought, why not go ***-from Darkness to Light*** a week early.

By-the way, the entire 5-week Small Group booklets are available to download on the website. If you need a hard copy, we can print one out for you here at church. Whether or not you are part of one of the discussion groups, I highly recommend to get your hands on this study guide as a way of orienting and unifying our Lenten walk together from week to week.

Even if you never came within a city block of a Bible, you all know the essence of the Adam & Eve story and probably have a real good idea of what Eve did. This is the Judeo/Christian origin story, or really, I should say origin stories, because from the very first pages of our sacred text we immediately have to wrestle in the conflict, confusion and paradox of two separate origin stories in the first two chapters of our Holy Bible. Seriously, check it out sometime. These kinds of things don't trouble me much anymore because when I dig deep into any of the many conflicts and inconsistencies of our scripture, I always end up with a more expansive understanding of God. When I look at anything from different points of view deeper meaning always emerges.

So, coming into Genesis chapter 3, we know that from a formless void of absolute nothingness God has created an entire ecosphere. There is darkness and light. (Remember this along our Lenten path.) God created both! There is water and sky, evening and morning, dry land, vegetation, fruits of every kind yielding self-sustaining seeds. Living creatures in the sea, the air and on land. Then when this magnificent, fully functioning, mysterious and awesome machine that we call the cosmos was ready and rolling, God created the first human beings, male and female in the image of God's self. Enter Adam and Eve, made in God's image to enjoy and care for all this wonderfulness in perfect peace, harmony and love. Truly, Eden was heaven on earth. Perfect! What could possibly go wrong? Well, there was this one thing. "The Lord God commanded Adam, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

...Aaaaand we have the very first plot point in all creation!

At first Adam and Eve were joyful following the plan. They had no shame what-so-ever. They walked around naked, happy and innocent. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was not even in their consideration. Innocence is just beautiful that way when we turn the page to Chapter 3. Listen to what happens next...

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 3:1-13

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?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 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.' " 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, knowing good and evil." 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. 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.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The Word of God for the people of God.**PRAYER**

Our Loving & Good God, how are we to understand this betrayal of your goodness, trust and generosity, and where is there any hope of redemption? As we begin to wrestle with this and other stories in Your Word, we truly seek to understand You and your nature in greater depth. Also, help us to understand ourselves in relationship to You and one another, as we walk through our Lenten journey from darkness to light. AMEN.

SERMON:***Betrayal and Redemption -from Darkness to Light - Part 1: Eve's Dilemma***

I guess the best way for us to begin this journey is by asking the question, "What exactly do we think of as betrayal and what do we mean when we use the word redemption?" As you will notice, when you download your colorfully produced

booklet, it is for this very reason that there is a handy glossary in the back which can be not only convenient but also quite helpful.

Betrayal *(the glossary reads) is a treacherous [deceitful] giving up to an enemy, a violation of trust or confidence, a revelation or divulging of something meant to be kept secret. [Betrayed: treacherously given up or exposed]*

This clinical definition of betrayal should guide us fairly well. Over the next 5 weeks, we will see all of these various kinds of betrayals as we go along. I imagine that most of us can think of times we have betrayed someone in big or small ways or have been betrayed ourselves. We can probably all recall situations where the whole “betrayal” thing was an innocent accident, a lapse in judgement in a pressurize environment or even a completely misinterpreted event where no betrayal ever actually happened. But, a real planned out or deliberate betrayal? Those are always carefully considered, weighed out. The choice must be morally rationalized. At least in the beginning, the betrayer must find justification.

“My spouse is no longer attracted to me. I’m only human.”

“I’m not a traitor, I’m a whistle blower. I’m a patriot!”

“I am just looking out for what is in the best interest and the welfare of my family.”

“It’s not as big a deal as she is making it out to be! Her little ‘confidential’ secret was killing her and everyone around her. I had to tell someone, for her own sake!”

“Hey, it’s just the way the game is played. The way I see it, I betrayed no one... until I get caught.”

Certainly, we see the gradual justifications begin to build up in Adam and Eve’s betrayal. That serpent was a crafty one, playing card by card a seemingly rational game to systematically dismantle the purity of innocence imbedded of the first humans. Adam and Eve begin to wonder if their unquestioned trust is misplaced? Is God playing us for fools? We read the story and can easily see the innocence beginning to crumble even before Eve takes a bite of the fruit. It’s so easy for us to see because our innocence has already crumbled! Mature people, sophisticated people, educated people usually regard innocence as a distasteful disability in anyone older than 5 years old. Sure, in some cases, at best, an innocent adult can be viewed as totally gullible, amusingly sweet simple person. Their lack of exposure and experience is almost endearing. At worst, in the real world we live in, innocence can be a real danger and pose a serious threat to the well-being of someone who too easily trusts. Naïveté can get you seriously hurt because you don’t even know you are in the clutches of evil until it is too late! A naïve innocent doesn’t even know what

evil is! Do you think this is what God created in the first humans, naïve innocents to be easily victimized and manipulated by the first silver-tongued demon they encounter?

What I was taught, all the way from children's church, through confirmation and on into my 20-year-old evangelical days was that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned! When tempted by Satan they turned from God, they hid from God and knew shame. Therefore, they condemned all human beings to be naturally sinful in our very nature and by willful choice, alienated from God, and under His powerful wrath. Maybe that's the way you see it today? It certainly sets the stage for the need for redemption. But if that is so than grace is all about saving our own necks from the vengeance of God. Not much love in that; from us or God. In fact, it sounds really transactional on both sides. Grace can never be a transaction. It's simply an unearned gift.

This brings us to the redemption part. The glossary in the back of our booklet reads:

Redemption - *deliverance from sin and its consequences by the atonement [being "at one" with others, unity, concord, agreement with others, restoration of friendly relations, settling of differences] of Jesus Christ.*

To unpack the deep and wide meaning of redemption is not something I can do in one sermon or even five sermons. Unlike the betrayal definition, redemption takes on a wide array of meanings for an even wider array of Christians. Defining what you say is redemption is the work of this Lenten series. I do think that most of us can agree that, for Christians, we are offered redemption, forgiveness, restoration, another chance at-one-ment - like it was in the Garden - through what Jesus did. In Jesus, redemption is offered only by absolute, unencumbered grace to anyone who is ready to receive it. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ everyone is shown the pathway back. So, we turn in that new direction, dropping the weight of our prideful delusions. We joyfully unmask our false, pretentious selves and find only forgiveness and acceptance. We are freed from our self-destructive, willfully self-justified, neatly rationalized betrayals.

One thing I know is certain. Only sinners can be redeemed, only sinners have any use for grace. A huge part of every Lenten season is to take time to intentionally and truly find your deepest confession to God. Lent is a time to look deep inside, not to condemn yourself or deflate your self-esteem or worthiness as a person, but rather to free yourself from all fear and anxieties to humbly live your best possible life. Finding your confession always begins in trusting that God actually does love you - wildly and without reservation, exactly as you are at this very moment. The entire Trinity is rooting hard for you to lean from the misdirection's mistakes and betrayals that have weighed you down for so long. Redemption can only begin in submission to God's very real, always eternal love for you, no matter what!

I have read interpretations about the story of “the fall” assert that this is about a test between a human’s obedience to God pitted against the essential gift of free will. If so, this story has nothing to do with morality. When we view Eve’s dilemma in this way, the protagonists, that represent all of us, fails miserably - and it still stands as an apt meta-narrative for the world on Sunday February 27th, 2022.

According to the story, it was Eve's initiative that led to the first humans giving in to temptation disobeying the command to leave the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil alone. She ate of it at the serpent's suggestion, then gave it to Adam, he shrugged and took a bite too. It was the knowledge of good and evil that birthed guilt, and shame leading to blame, hiding, keeping secrets and accusation. These feelings and actions are always indicators of a disconnection from the Divine. What we often label as “sin”. Ultimately the two were banished from that perfect Garden of pleasure. But the story does not end there. Once again God offers redemption and a new relationship with The Creator began.

There was a great medieval Rabbi, named Judah Lowe of Prague. He wondered if the act of our creation was not actually completed - we did not really become fully human until we could *learn the difference* between good and evil. We do not become human beings, not really and not completely, until the day when we develop the ability to understand and work for good, and against evil. In the innocence of the Garden, it was impossible to distinguish between right and wrong. Maybe Eve’s action that fateful day was, in fact a critically essential part of God’s whole creation! Because of Eve, we know about our free will. We know that we have agency to choose and to act. And, because of Adam and Eve’s story, we know there is always a reaction for all our actions.

From darkness to light is the story of God and Her beloved humans, tenderly created in Her very image. TriCon Church, I believe with all my heart and I know with all my being that even now in the midst of these ever-escalating, insanely troubling times, that there will always continue to be Divine experiences of deep redemption and transformation.

But don’t take my word for it, come listen to the kids next Sunday!