

Scriptures

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but 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.”

3 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?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but 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.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So 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. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

Matthew 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Sermon: Adam 2.0

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Temptation stories – two of them. Adam and Eve, and later Jesus, faced temptation. The first story didn’t end so well; Eve, and then Adam chose to disobey God and sin was introduced into the world.

This very first sin began something that we, as human beings, are powerless to stop. We’ve opened Pandora’s box, we’ve squeezed out all the toothpaste and can’t put it back into the tube. There are some things that cannot be undone; sin is one of them.

This introduction of sin into the world is referred to as the doctrine of original sin. As it is commonly understood, the doctrine of original sin states that because Adam sinned, we are all tainted by that sin. None of us are free, even if we do good all the time, we still bear the stain of that initial crime that got Adam and Eve thrown out of Eden, with an angel with a flaming sword placed to guard the way back.

This strikes some people as being an incredibly unfair arrangement – making us do the time for someone else’s crime. Why does this ancient sin affect me at all? I wasn’t even born, certainly none of us were complicit in that event so long ago.

Indeed, many ask, why did God even put that tree there in the first place? Was it a set up? Were humanity doomed to fail – created to fail even? If there were no tree, there would be no sin, the world would still be a luscious garden, and Jesus would have been spared a great deal of pain and suffering – everybody would win. So – why the tree, God, why the tree?

Simply put, the tree was a choice – nothing more. There was nothing special about the fruit; the bible doesn’t say that this tree was particularly pleasing to look at, or had an especially enticing aroma, or that it had uniquely low branches heavy laden with easily accessible fruit with no seeds or tough skin. There was nothing remarkable about this tree other than the fact that it was located in the center of the garden so that both Adam and Eve would not confuse it with any other trees.

God called this the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and commanded his humans not to eat of it, for if they did then they would surely die. They wouldn’t die because God planted a poison tree – the

tree itself is not poison. However, they would die because as a result of their choice sin would poison their lives.

At its simplest, sin is a rejection of God in favour of ourselves. Sin is placing our desires higher than anything and anyone else; sin is giving our satisfaction primacy of place amongst all other things. Sin is the attitude of 'me first.'

If we look at God, as he has revealed himself to us, we see that God is a Trinity. The idea of God being one integrated being yet having three distinct personae is confusing to us, but for today the only we have to understand about the Trinity is that it must be self giving. If one part of the Trinity had the attitude of 'me first,' then the other two parts would suffer. There would be discord, discontent, dissatisfaction – there would be a fractured relationship within God – God would be broken.

Of course, a broken God is no God at all; the God of Isaac and Abraham is whole. Which means that God does not subscribe to the 'me first' attitude – instead God is self-giving. Each person of God exists for the others, and in fact, this self-giving within God is so strong that it spilled out of the Godhead into what we call the universe. There was too much giving to be contained – God had to make creation itself as an overflow reservoir of sorts for his self-giving love.

When we adopt a posture of 'me first,' we make ourselves unlike God. We make ourselves the antithesis of God. Not in the sense that we are rather limited copies of God due to our finite nature, but when we say 'me first' we set ourselves in opposition to the very thing that defines God – his love. We become selfish. Love looks outward, selfishness inward. Love is open, selfishness closed. Being selfish wouldn't necessarily be a problem for us if we were all powerful and alone in the universe with no competitors, then it really is all about me - but the reality is that we are not alone, we are not all powerful; in fact, we are fully dependant upon God for everything.

I didn't choose to be born, I didn't make the air I breathe, the food I eat, or the family and friends I am surrounded by. Certainly, I have no claim to the eternal spirit within me; all of these things are gifts. We have a cultural myth of the self-made man, but even the briefest of analysis reveals how woefully empty this concept is.

So when I set myself against God, when I declare 'me first' and act as though I am alone in the universe, or at least most important in the universe, I thereby cut myself off from God, which means that I am cutting myself off from my very source of life. Sin results in death because sin is our own voluntary rejection of the very God who is our life. We may twitch around on the table for a while – but death is the inevitable consequence that waits for us once we have sinned.

So – let's go back to our question – why the tree? Why is the possibility of sin present in the garden? If we are made in God's image and are to live into that image we have to be like the self-giving God – placing the other before ourselves. Clearly, as created beings we have nothing tangible to offer God – all of creation is his – the only things that we can offer are love and gratitude. Love and gratitude are expressed by elevating the other above ourselves. When we love someone, we do the things that we know will please them. When we're young that may take the form of flowers and poetry, later it may be getting up in the middle of the night to tend to a sick child or spouse, perhaps when we're older our pleasing each other may look more like making coffee and reading the paper to a spouse whose eyesight is failing.

The point is that love is shown when we place our wills beneath someone else's will, we love when we are in service to another. Surprisingly, we find that love is expressed in obedience. Not the way we normally think of love, but it is in the bible – Jesus said directly 'if you love me you will obey my commands.'

If God is love, and love is expressed in obedience, then God placed the tree in the garden to reveal the image of God within us; the humble will and the love that comes from our creator. We don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in the garden with the presence of God before they decided that their satisfaction and curiosity were more important than obedience, but we do know what happened next. They chose not to continue in obedience. Adam and Eve became selfish and they sinned.

Afterward, Adam and Eve hid. Before any accusation was made, the man and woman realized that they had broken the relationship with God. They had already tried to cover themselves up with fig leaves, and when that didn't work, they tried to cover up with lies and blame: Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent. Selfishness had taken hold and everyone was trying to throw everyone else under the bus to save themselves. Me first. Everything had fallen to pieces, and the man and woman could no longer bear to be in the presence of God.

Then death entered in. God saw that they could not stand before him in their shame and so he killed an animal to fashion garments out of its skin for the fallen humans. The first death occurred so to cover the guilt and shame of both Adam and Eve. This was the very first in a long line of sacrifices and atonement through blood.

Once Sin had entered creation it broke the relationships between God and humanity, between the humans themselves, and between humanity and the animal world – the environment. This is a serious, serious issue. Again we come back to the question - what does it have to do with us, with me? I didn't eat the apple, and it's not right for God to punish all of us forever for one little thing that happened to people long dead in a garden that no longer exists. Original sin is only a tool the church uses to control otherwise good people and keep them wallowing in guilt, isn't it?

Here's the thing – even though I didn't eat that apple, or whatever kind of fruit it may have been – but I certainly have been guilty of that 'me first' mentality. Even this morning. Sin is clearly present in me. I leave in my wake a string of broken relationships – I abuse God, other people, the world I live in – just for my own convenience and satisfaction. Though I didn't participate in the original sin, I can't deny that sin is present in me. None of us can.

The Bible speaks of the sins of a father being visited on even the third and the fourth generations after him. This strikes us as being terribly unfair; fruitage is being passed down the ages. Our feelings of outrage or unfairness though I suspect are unfounded – we are misunderstanding how sin works. It's not that God has decided to punish us forever; it's that we have unleashed a beast in our midst.

Think of a violently alcoholic father. How do you think his kids are? Abused, terrified, always hiding, trying to live invisibly? Those kids are scarred – they will bear the effects of their father's sin for years. Those kids will often grow up not knowing how to parent or show love themselves and turn out yet another generation of scarred children. How about the children of a gambler who squandered all the savings so that the kids aren't able to go to college, or worse – if the gambler has lost the family home? Who is bearing the damage caused by the sin?

It's not just fathers; abusive domineering mothers, cruel aunts, touchy uncles. Look at the legacy of the residential school system in Canada in which a whole generation of people were pulled from their homes and many abused. It wasn't their sin, but the sin perpetuated on them will take generations to heal – hurt people continue to hurt people.

Sin is passed on generationally, but also among our present companions. When we sin we pull others into our sin – we saw this with Adam and Eve. Rarely do we sin alone. My lie becomes your lie when I ask you to cover for me. My crime of adultery can't happen without drawing someone else into sin. I find that when I sin, not only do I hurt others, but I generally also draw others into sin with me. Misery loves company, I guess.

It turns out that the world is filled with sin – we need not complain about a rigged game where God made us all pay for one sin – we all do enough damage on our own.

At this point things are looking pretty dire. One person introduced sin into the world, and it has spread like wildfire – fast and destructive. Paul wrote in Romans 'sin came into the world through one man; death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned. Many have died through the one man's trespass.'

Although things look bleak, we look back on what Paul wrote about the introduction of sin into the world and read that he wrote about Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. This makes Adam sound like a precursor. Who, then, is the one to come?

If Adam was the beta version, then Jesus is Adam 2.0. Jesus is, of course, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of Israel, the Lamb of God and Redeemer of the world. Jesus is the one to come.

In the lectionary this week we see the temptation of Adam and Eve contrasted with the temptation of Christ. These stories have much different endings, don't they? We hear the phrase 'the first Adam and the last Adam' and this is what it refers to; in these two narratives we see the prototype and the fulfillment – possibility and realization.

We know that Jesus is fully human; when I first heard that I thought that it meant that Jesus was flesh and blood – not merely a spirit – and so when Jesus was beaten he felt the pain, and when he was crucified, he actually suffered. It does mean that, but it means so much more.

When we say that Jesus is fully human what this means is that Jesus is fully human in a way in which we are not – Jesus is the first fully realized human. We see this in his temptation. Jesus did not fail as we fail. Jesus remained in loving obedience to the father.

Jesus is what we were created to be. That's why comparing ourselves to others is such a fools' game. I can find many people beside whom I look like an angel. Of course, there are plenty more who would make me look completely corrupt, but I don't like those comparisons as much. The point is that since Jesus is the one who is fully human, and Jesus is the fulfillment of humanity, then Jesus sets the standard for humanity. When we feel the urge to compare, we should be comparing ourselves with him.

Jesus faced temptation as we all do. He was tempted by comfort, security and power – just as we all are. Yet he remained in the will of the father, as we often do not. However – this is not to condemn us

and show us how weak and pitiful we are, though we shouldn't ignore those revelations, but he did so in order to show us that it can be done. Jesus shows us that there is hope, and though sin pervasive throughout the world it is not all-powerful, nor is it irresistible.

The sins in the world certainly affected Jesus – I spoke about how when others sin against us it leaves scars. Jesus had an early life of living on the run as a refugee who had to leave his home to escape persecution. Not only did he bear the hardship of a life on the road, but he also had to bear the knowledge that his whole family faced persecution because of him, and that other innocents were killed because someone wanted to find him. That had to leave a mark. I'm sure he had a childhood that involved teasing and taunting, some violence, some hunger, some fear. Yet, when faced with temptation, when faced with the opportunity to say 'me first,' he chose otherwise. Jesus showed us what God had planned since the beginning – he showed us what being human is supposed to look like.

Sometimes we think about God's law and sin and somehow get the impression that we are to be simpering sycophants, that we are slaves who cower before the law and live our lives scrabbling in the dust. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The example that Jesus showed us in his refusing the temptations that the devil placed before him is of a human who is strong and free. Jesus told the devil where to go with no fear, and cited scripture as his authority to do so. As we follow Jesus' path we see a man of power who has no fear in facing down the civil authorities, religious rulers, hostile crowds, and even exercises his dominion over the wind and the waves. Fully human Jesus is bold, courageous, and even dangerous.

What we find in comparing these temptation stories is that it is when we submit to sin, that we become naked and fearful, sacrificing others to save our own skins. Sin makes us slaves, not God. Where are the confident and capable Adam and Eve who were to be co-creators with God, who were to have dominion and exercise authority over all creation? They are hiding, because their sin has robbed them of their vitality and purpose.

Jesus shows us a new way. A way of power and purpose; a way that lifts others up rather than subjugating them; a way that heals relationships rather than destroying them.

Jesus resisted the devil using scripture. We can do that. Maybe not all of us right now, but if we read our bibles half as much as Facebook then in not too long we would find ourselves quoting chapter and verse. The universe was created with God's word – God's word is also the weapon of the resistance.

We have the double-edged sword of the word of God as our weapon, and we have grace as our defense. As long as Adam and Eve bore their sins, they were naked and exposed – the accuser would always have a foothold in them. They were vulnerable.

Jesus has taken that away. The cross was God's declaration of forgiveness. God has declared our sins, not null and void, they aren't gone, but our sins are powerless to condemn us. The accuser no longer has that foothold, there is no weak spot in our armour and so we are empowered to resist; we fight with no fear and with God on our side. Paul writes 'If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.' Sin gives dominion to death, the grace and righteousness of Christ gives dominion to life.

Jesus came declaring the Kingdom of God. It is present among us, and it is found wherever two or three are gathered in his name. This is a kingdom of powerful human beings; free humans filled with the word and spirit who fearlessly challenge the powers and institutions of this world that cause suffering and injustice; human beings who do not fear the devil because we cannot be deceived. We are clear in the word of God, secure in our redemption. Adam and Eve 2.0 – not sinless, but free from sin.

We leave this service today empowered by the word of God, and fed by the body of Christ to be the body of Christ in the world. Live in peace with God, and with one another.

Amen.