

“Original Sin”

The Rev Drew Willard
UCC@The Villages, FL
March 13, 2011

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-13

Matthew 4:1-11

‘11[The LORD God] said,

“Who told you that you were naked?

Have you eaten from the tree

of which I commanded you not to eat?”

12The man said,

“The woman whom you gave to be with me,

she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

13Then the Lord God said to the woman,

“What is this that you have done?”

The woman said,

“The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” ’

Gen. 3:11-13

Let us pray... O God,

Free us from all that is unworthy of us – especially the ‘blame game’

and help us to live up to our potential to be true to ourselves

and so, be true to others.

Amen

Original sin – now there’s a juicy topic!

If only Eve hadn’t taken a bite out of that apple,

we wouldn’t be in the fix we’re in now.

Or so some would have us believe throughout 2,000 years

of Church history – but is that accurate?

It’s been very convenient to have someone to blame –

like the snake, because who likes snakes anyway?

But this story lends itself to the notion in many cultures

that women are temptresses that need to be controlled.

This story of the [quote] ‘Fall of Man’ has served male chauvinism

quite well like the medieval chastity belt and the burqah

for reminding women of their place in society.

And that “place” – that condition of oppression,

has not gone unnoticed by our God

who hears the cries of injustice and

‘seeks to save all people from aimlessness and sin’

as it says in the UCC Statement of Faith.

Willard, p.2

Phyllis Trible is a feminist theologian and one of my heroes,
because she demonstrates through her writings that the truth
of the Bible is resilient even under sharpest scrutiny.

Now, texts like the Temptation in the Garden
have turned some women against the Bible –
saying it is written by men and does not serve
as a credible resource in their fight for equality.

But Dr. Trible has taken an unflinching stand
to find the voice of God advocating for women
as she reads between the lines
of even the most patriarchal verses;

And humor is to be found there, too, to heal and reconcile.

According to Phyllis Trible,

Eve was the first theologian because she interpreted
what God had commanded about that particular tree.

In Genesis 3:1b – 3,

[The serpent] 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[italics added], or you shall die.” ’

‘Nor shall you touch it’ – those are Eve’s words to emphasize
God’s prohibition to Adam & Eve.

Still the serpent reasoned with Eve and convinced her

to eat the fruit – which may or may not have been an apple.

And do you recall what Adam said

when Eve offered him some of that fruit?

Nothing!

Genesis says,

‘...she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.’

He was standing right there and didn’t say a thing!

He just did what he was told. Gentlemen, sound familiar?

Oh, by the way, Dr. Trible points out that the word ‘Adam’

comes from the same word that means ‘earth’ or

‘dirt’ – as in ‘dumb as...’, you get the picture!

Willard, p.3

So, there it is – right under the noses of the patriarchs,
how the woman was the thoughtful, reflective one in this story
while the man was the passive stooge.

This may not sound like ‘Good News for Modern Man’,
but it is hopeful for us all in the long run
to believe that there is a subtext of justice
that is matched by the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth,
who time and again was a champion for women.

But getting back to the Original Sin –
What if it was not simply about disobedience
and taking a bite out of forbidden fruit,
though that did have its consequences.

What if the real issue at hand was the refusal
to accept responsibility for one’s actions?

What if the Original Sin was saying,
“She did it!”

And what if that was the main reason for the Son of God
to come into the world to suffer and die
for the sake of humankind?

What if Christ came to free us
from the ‘name, blame, and get rid of same’ game
used time and again to keep people divided and conquered.

What if?

The word ‘If’ can mean an invitation to imagine new ways
of interpreting God’s message for us in our time.
Or it can be used to raise doubts and shut down momentum.

In the instance of Jesus’ temptation by Satan –
a name that literally means ‘enemy’,
Jesus is tempted to prove himself
by various demonstrations of power.

Jesus is tempted to doubt his identity as the Son of God –
which is the subject of considerable debate these days.

The notion in this case of Jesus as the Son of God
is about whether or not that implies special powers
to defy the laws of physics and faith.

Willard, p.4

At no time does Jesus take the bait

and he remains firmly resolute about who he is.

It is a duel in the desert in the form of a debate,

and Jesus' words are like a sword that he uses

to cut down the devil's arguments at every turn.

In the end, the enemy of God and humanity is driven away

as a legitimate act of exclusion.

The voice of prejudice, the voice of obsession is rightfully driven away.

Later on in the 14th Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew,

Jesus will again be tempted when he hears the news

of the death of John the Baptist –

tempted to act out of fear or rage.

He will go away to find the solitude of prayer

only to find a crowd of thousands of people waiting for him.

But then he seems to do what he was tempted to do earlier –

a series of spectacular demonstrations of power.

Yet, it is as if they are a mockery of the earlier challenges by Satan.

Instead of turning stone into bread,

Jesus turns bread into more bread.

Instead of jumping off a building,

Jesus walks on the water – like the Spirit at Creation,

hovering over the face of the deep.

Instead of kissing the devil's foot,

the disciples kiss Jesus' feet after he climbed into their boat

after walking on the sea.

Jesus is no longer tempted to doubt himself,

he knows the measure and the responsibilities

associated with his powers.

He knows who he is.

And soon after these events,

Jesus will say over and over again to his disciples that,

“The Son of Man, the True Heir of Humanity

will suffer and die at the hands of sinful people,

but on the third day rise.”

Willard, p.5

Jesus will suffer because that is the consequence of disrupting
the powers of this world that use 'the blame game'
to keep people divided and conquered.

But Jesus is rooted in that which cannot be divided and conquered;
He completely identified himself with the character of God
as one who heals and guides,
as one who gives life and even gives up life for the sake of others,
as one who loves.

Jesus can tell the difference and we are to follow his example
of discerning between the voice of pride and prejudice
and the voice of God that is still speaking
and calling us into authentic life, into eternal life.

Amen

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-13

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;

17 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.'

3:1 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"?''

2 The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;

3 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."'

4 But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die;

5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,* knowing good and evil.'

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.

9 But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'

10 He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.'

11 He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'

12 The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.'

13 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.'

Matthew 4:1-11

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness
to be tempted by the devil.

2He fasted for 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." '

5 Then 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." '

7Jesus 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 splendour; 9and he said to him,
'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'

10Jesus said to him,
'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,
"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

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