

“Are you burning your hand on a hot stove?” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
March 5, 2017 First Sunday in Lent
Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7, Matthew 4:1-11

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

The story of Adam and Eve eating forbidden fruit has become a part of our culture. People talk about the seductive Eve, a woman who will lead a man astray. The phrase forbidden fruit means something that is desired all the more because it is not allowed. When you think about it, many of these allusions to the story of Adam and Eve relate to human sexuality – and not usually a positive view of human sexuality.

Is that really what the story of Adam and Eve is about? Are there assumptions that we make that are not true to the Bible’s telling of the story? Much like the myths that have grown up around the story of the wise men’s visit to baby Jesus, the story of Adam and Eve has myths that surround it. Let’s look at what the Bible actually says about Adam and Eve and the serpent.

When I mention the Garden of Eden what do you think of? A beautiful, perfect place where Adam and Eve just sat around, ate ripe, luscious fruit picked from the trees in the garden, and played with the animals and walked and talked with God? What does the Bible say? I read today, Genesis 2:15 - **The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.** Adam and Eve had work to do, purposeful work, tilling and keeping up the Garden. They literally did enjoy the fruits of their labor. And they did enjoy time with God in the Garden.

Yes, Adam and Eve had it good. But they were not totally free to do as they pleased. The Bible mentions one restriction God placed on Adam and Eve’s freedoms: not eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

What about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? We don’t know if the tree was an apple tree, do we? So all those pictures of apples are like the pictures of the three wise men – not based on the Biblical text.

What about the serpent? Is the serpent the devil or Satan? That’s a good question. Did God put the devil in the garden to tempt Adam and Eve? Wasn’t God’s creation ‘good’? Why in the world would a loving God tempt Adam and Eve? I don’t think God did! The snake or serpent in many ancient cultures represents wisdom and life and death. So, the Hebrew people reading this story most likely would not think of the snake as Satan or the devil. That’s our interpretation based on our cultural history. Most likely the serpent represented wisdom or the knowledge of good and evil.

Another misconception is that Eve led Adam astray. What does the Bible say? I read today Genesis 3:6 - **she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.** Adam didn’t try to stop her. He could have, but didn’t. So, it seems to me that both Adam and Eve were equally involved in this rebellion against God’s command.

Couldn’t Eve or Adam have told the snake to bug off, to get lost? What motivated them to even listen to the snake? You can probably come up with your own answer to that question, but I think the answer is a bit like telling the young child the stove is hot, and if you touch it, you will get

burned. What does the child do? He or she touches the stove and gets burned. The young child is testing limits, some would say rebelling against authority.

God gave Adam and Eve limits. But God also gave them and us the freedom to explore our limits – and explore we do. Like Adam and Eve, we make wrong choices all too often because those choices are what we want, not what God would want us to choose.

Adam and Eve did choose – and they lost their innocence. This is symbolized in the story by their realization that they were naked. They hid from God. And humans have been trying to hide our actions, our disobedience from God ever since that day. We, like the young child and the hot stove, test the limits that God, like a loving parent, puts on us.

The story of Adam and Eve. There's much mystery in this story. Mysterious forces are presented in God's 'good' creation. Why did the snake, one of God's creations, tempt Adam and Eve. Why would Adam and Eve choose to rebel against God when they had it so good? From the Adam and Eve story, we learn that the desire to rebel seems to have been mysteriously written on the hearts of humans from the very beginning.

In my Bible this story is titled 'the Fall.' Perhaps we shouldn't call this story 'the Fall.' Maybe this story isn't describing where sin originated, but is instead, describing the mystery of the reality of what it means to be human. The story really may be about the mystery of human tendency to rebel against God, to resist the limitations that God placed on Adam and Eve and places on us. Perhaps the story describes our desire to be like God instead of being thankful for God's creation and our life which God has given us.

This story certainly foreshadows the history of the Hebrew people who consistently resisted the limitations God put on them. The Hebrew people wanted to be like God, to be in control of their own lives instead of following God. Their history is a story of one rebellion after another.

But God did not reject the Hebrew people. God took them back after the rebellion and cared for them. Likewise, God cared for Adam and Eve after their rebellion. God made clothes for them before he sent them out of the garden. It's interesting to me to reflect on this simple statement from Genesis 3:21 - **And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.** Where did God get the skins for their clothes? God had to sacrifice one of the animals God created to obtain the skins. Is this a foreshadowing of God's sacrifice of Jesus to show God's love for you and me?

Adam and Eve. Are we, as humans, trapped in this cycle of rebellious ways generation after generation. From today's story of Jesus' temptation, we are given hope. There is one who was tempted but resisted the temptation. Jesus, though human, broke the human cycle of rebellion. Jesus showed us what life looks like if we are thankful for God's creation and the life that God has given us. Jesus showed us how to love and not be rebellious and self-centered.

So how do each of us fit into the story of Adam and Eve? Only you can answer that question. During the Lenten season we are each encouraged to take time for self-examination. It's a time each of us can examine our lives to see whether you and I are living following Christ's example or living following Adam and Eve's example. Take an honest look at your life over the next 40 days to see whose example you are closer to. If there's a need for mid-course correction, make it.

May God bless your every effort.