

Sunday March 1, 2020
Lesson 1: Because of Sin
Scripture: Genesis 3: 8-24

Context:

Our new series for the spring season of 2020 appropriately begins with the wilderness as we start the first Sunday of Lent. The wilderness is the place where Jesus actually went before his official ministry began in public. For Christians, the wilderness offers more than barren landscapes or tumbleweeds. The wilderness is a place of temptation, growth, and even hope.

This first passage in the unit comes from the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The story is part of the Adam and Eve narrative, telling of their fall in the Garden of Eden. Where we arrive at in the story is after Adam and Eve have devoured fruit from the tree they were told to not touch. They find themselves in the garden, aware of their transgression and waiting to see what will happen.

The gardener, the Lord, discovers them and asks why they are hiding. Adam replies they are naked and should not be seen, revealing they have eaten from the tree they were told not to eat. There are questions to both individuals and they are asked who led them to the tree. Then, the talking serpent is presented in the midst of the trial in the garden.

All parties are guilty. Thus God must give judgments for those who have transgressed in the garden. The serpent will lose their legs, forced to crawl along their belly the rest of their days and will always be at odds with the offspring of the humans. The humans will receive their own struggles: the woman will have pain in childbirth and the man will be forced to till the land. Yet God clothes both individuals after the pronouncement of their sentence.

However, Adam and Eve must still leave the garden. The temptation will be to eat from the tree of life and then they will become gods. Thus, both Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden to till the land from which they came. A cherubim is sent to guard the garden and the tree of life.

If we read the story plainly, there are no explanations given to us from the text about the meaning or morals in the story. However, this story becomes the basis for the understanding of original sin and also the grace of God. The story is not simply about human disobedience and divine displeasure; it is a story of how when the facts warrant death for humanity, God insists on life for the condemned.¹ The humans could have been punished for immediate death for their disobedience, yet God forgave and gave them another chance.

One could also read the story as how humanity brings about our own plagues. The story presents a theological critique of anxiety as both the man and woman attempt to circumvent the reality of God.² They choose not to be vulnerable with God and reject

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2010), 50.

² *Ibid.*, 53.

God's care to seek their own well being based on their terms.³ We are led to see the results of trying to manage our anxiety by doing our own thing and not trusting God.

Application:

A temptation with this story in Genesis is to play the blame game and we usually see how that plays out. We cry: "It's the serpent's fault!" as we translate that to saying: "The devil made me do it." We cry: "It's Eve's fault!" as we translate to men saying that women should not hold leadership positions in the church or the world. We cry: "It's Adam's fault!" and the translation is telling men that their worth is based on overpowering or controlling others. In all those scenarios we see the anxiety of the world get carried out even more and the story repeats itself.

A step back from the text might invite us to ask where God is in the midst of the story. Throughout the story, we hear that all parties are to blame. All of them hid behind each other and all were guilty of transgressing in the Garden of Eden. The serpent had no business getting between God and the humans. Both Adam and Eve became anxious and allowed their desire to control things overwhelm them. As a result, they made a mess that affected them for years to come.

And yet God wouldn't let them completely destroy themselves. When they deserved cruel death and punishment for their anxiety that overcame them, God instead clothed them and gave them a new home. Even in the midst of their behavior, God still extended grace to them.

We would do well to remember that we are sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. At times, we allow ourselves to be overrun by anxiety. We wish that we could control the elements of our lives whether that includes people or situations in our work places, homes, communities, or churches. At times we become so anxious that we begin to make the problems worse as we contribute to issues by spreading our anxiety around, wanting others to join us in the fear mongering.

We spend our time wondering about what we can do to have some element of control over our lives and at times we over function, sometimes cleaning up messes that are not ours to clean. We give into hostile personalities because we cannot stand the idea of someone being mad at us or not liking us. Our personal health becomes our last focus as we rush around doing things to fill our time and energy to make life easier for others. We create our own personal hells and at times would be content to drag others there with us.

We find ourselves in the wilderness and the temptation is to try and appease our anxiety. This especially takes place during Lent and especially now in our time with the United Methodist Church. There are those who want to fill their time researching all the plans about what may happen in May. Some individuals propose we need to be discussing this around the clock to make decisions. People have their opinions and vitriolic comments ready to spar at others. There are those who want meeting after meeting to help spread the anxiety. People talk about divorce and separation as if that is the best thing for all parties, leaving Jesus out of the conversation with all his comments on divorce and loving one another just as he loved us.

Perhaps our response this Lent should be something different. As we find

³ Ibid., 54.

ourselves in the Garden of Eden again as the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we would do well to remember that anxiety is not the cure for our warring madness. Instead, our Lord reminds us that God will tend to us. This season of Lent is one where we are invited to ask if we are trusting our Lord or looking to other places to secure our identity and our worth. May we remember that the master gardener who is our Creator will always be the one who provides.

What disciplines help you in your wilderness periods? How do you plan to draw closer to Christ this Lent? Where is God calling you to release your anxiety and trust? How can anxiety ruin relationships and even our own bodies? How can the wilderness be a place of growth for you?

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