

In a week where you may've been there for everyone else, I invite you to take a moment to place your hand on your heart for some self-care - remember yourself and *your* need this hour.... and let Jesus be with you.

Thank you, Choir, for *Just as I am*, surely, one of the great hymns, along with Amazing Grace. And, thank you, Jesus, who long after Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden, brought *Grace* into the world.

You Learn, You Grow

First Congregational Church, Branford

Genesis 3:1-24, The Message

February 23, 2020

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I have a bit of a long intro. In today's reading from Genesis, Adam and Eve had already been created, and are set now for an encounter with the devil. I'm not going to get into that it was *nasty woman* who was tempted and she brought down the man, or the other theory that woman was smarter than man and had to open his eyes. Both are wrong - the point is, they were both tempted. It's really important to remember the books of the bible were written in a time when women were deemed just a little above dogs. That's why men do everything great in the bible and women are temptresses and harlots... or they're a virgin. Some say Moses wrote The Book of Genesis, others say King Solomon. It was written at least 1,000 years before Christ. Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. It is *Judaism's* account of the creation of the world and the origins of the Jewish people - written as a way to explain why life is so hard... why childbirth is painful and work so grueling. It's a story about the beginning of humankind, and it shines a spotlight on 2 aspects of human behavior - that human beings are **tempted**, and they **blame** one another. The author says temptation, and blame are at our *core*.

Last week we talked about God choosing to be a God of blessing, not cursing - that he would never again try to take out humankind, the way he did with the flood. But, today's passage is *before* Noah and the flood, so you're going to hear God cursin' Adam and Eve somethin' awful. Hold onto your hats!

I'm reading from The Message, which is a more contemporary and conversational translation of the bible.

The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal God had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

The Woman said to the serpent, “Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It’s only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.’”

The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”

When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she’d know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on”—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

When they heard the sound of God strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and the Woman hid in the trees of the garden, hid from God.

God called to the Man: “Where are you?”

He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

God said, “Who told you you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?”

The Man said, “The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it.”

God said to the Woman, “What is this that you’ve done?”

“The serpent seduced me,” she said, “and I ate.”

God told the serpent:

“Because you’ve done this, you’re cursed,
cursed beyond all cattle and wild animals,

Cursed to slink on your belly
and eat dirt all your life.

I’m declaring war between you and the Woman,
between your offspring and hers.

He’ll wound your head,
you’ll wound his heel.”

He told the Woman:

“I’ll multiply your pains in childbirth;
you’ll give birth to your babies in pain.

You’ll want to please your husband,
but he’ll lord it over you.”

He told the Man:

“Because you listened to your wife
and ate from the tree
That I commanded you not to eat from,
‘Don’t eat from this tree,’
The very ground is cursed because of you;
getting food from the ground
Will be as painful as having babies is for your wife;
you’ll be working in pain all your life long.
The ground will sprout thorns and weeds,
you’ll get your food the hard way,
Planting and tilling and harvesting,
sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk,
Until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried;
you started out as dirt, you’ll end up dirt.”
The Man, known as Adam, named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all
the living.
God made leather clothing for Adam and his wife and dressed them.
God said, “The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything,
ranging from good to evil. What if he now should reach out and take fruit from the
Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!”
So God expelled them from the Garden of Eden and sent them to work the ground,
the same dirt out of which they’d been made. He threw them out of the garden and
stationed angel-cherubim and a revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding the path
to the Tree-of-Life.

The word of God for the people of God.

The Garden of Eden - Eden means Paradise, is often interpreted as an allegory about *growing up*... The Garden of Eden, like childhood, is a time of innocence. Humans like to hold onto this idea that there was a time when all was well, and they long to get back to it. Which is why people love fairytales and fantasies. Think of Neverland, an imaginary faraway place, where Peter Pan, Tinker Bell, the Lost Boys and other mythical creatures live. *Peter Pan refused to grow up*. Neverland and the Garden of Eden are metaphors for eternal childhood, immortality, and escapism. I think fantasies cause us harm because *they’re not real life*. We need our eyes opened.

The Garden of Eden story at least tries to address this by acknowledging that something comes along to take our innocence away. Something opens our eyes. I’m sure you know the moment when Eden was over for you... and you

understood in your *hurting heart* that life on earth was not going to be paradise. We'll talk about that in a bit.

It's been said, if God had wanted us to stay innocent, He wouldn't have created a garden with such mysterious trees.... I mean, *come on*. God tempted Adam and Eve in the passage before this one by talking about the wonders of the garden, saying over and over, "now, this fruit over here, this great, delicious, awesome fruit - well, you can't have that." If you're told you can't have something, don't you want it more than anything?! It's like being a guest in someone's home and they say, everything in the refrigerator is yours, but you see that beautiful little pink box in the back - yeah, that one with the irresistible bow on it..... you can't have that. When people get married and discover their spouse is no picnic, and along comes Mr. or Ms. Perfect.... no, you can't have that!

God *knew* what was going to happen! But, yes, there *is* a message in there, and it's that, the same way God's gonna wanna know where Jesus's allegiance is when he sends him into the desert next Sunday to be tempted by the devil, God wants to know where our allegiance is going to be, too.... *You must love no other God but me. There are limits I'm imposing - I'm giving you the 10 Commandments. Life's going to go better for you if you don't succumb to temptation, if you keep me first in your life.*

Sometimes we wonder why we got the world we got, but by giving us a world where goodness and evil exist, human beings could learn, and make their own choices. Rock star Alanis Morissette sang a song in the 90's called "You Learn." *You learn, you grow, you learn, you grow.* That seems to have been God's intent - for us to grow. Great, right?

I've wondered, though... if at first God wanted to keep us all to himself, and to keep us in a protected environment. Don't parents often feel that way to begin with their children?? Until they've been so awful they wanna kick them out! Remember when it was hard to let them go out to play alone or to a friend's home, or go off to school that first day? We said, *don't do this, don't do that, be good.* Remember the first time you had to watch them get on a schoolbus, not knowing if they were going to get there, not knowing if someone was going to hurt their feelings, not knowing if they were going to cheat on their math test, not knowing if they'd fall and scrape their knee. *It hurts something awful* to let our children go, to give them the freedom *to walk away from us*, to make their own choices. But... you learn, you grow, you learn, you grow...

The truth is, without the tree of knowledge, without opened eyes, we would've been little more than God's pets. God *had* to let us go, and just like children who don't want to leave home, a good parent has to nudge them out into the world, right?

God expelled his children from Eden. He sent them to work, to get their fingers dirty, *to grow up*, to know there's no free lunch, and you won't always get what you want. BUT, you learn, *you grow*, you learn, *you grow*.

It's this growing thing that God likes! He wants us to be fruitful. To not just take his fruit, but to become fruit!

And, part of bearing fruit means to make other humans... which is where death comes in. When they're too many humans, they have to die to make room for new ones. It's being fruitful, growthful. And, God knew... that inserting death into human life would make life more precious. It would make life more precious. Great, right?

I do wanna lift up the serpent a little bit. The serpent caused the pain that took our innocence. Can you think back - what came and took your innocence away? Maybe Santa, was it a death, a sexual encounter, an addiction, time in jail, infertility, a health issue, divorce? The symbol for the healer is the serpent. As it was for Adam and Eve, the thing that hurts you is more than likely going to be the path to your healing, *to your growing*. We must face our pain to be healed.

Beloved, I've said a lot here today.... I think what the author of Genesis wants us *most* to know is that we can't live independent of God. We need to remember Who we belong to. God formed, breathed, planted, put, made, took, commanded. When God isn't first in our life, we often can't resist the temptation to steal, have an affair, hold our tongue with our spouse or child, drink too much, talk about somebody behind their back, judge, or physically or verbally harm people. When God's not first, we *lose* the temptation wars.

Now, I've saved the best for last! You're going to love this. Because, Jesus trumps all of this! When we give in to temptation, which we do, when we break the commandments, which we do, when we fail, which we do, the *New Testament* tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, from the God who stays. We are loved and accepted *just as we are*. But, please, do *learn and grow*. Heal your pain.

Now, go out and enjoy the garden. Jesus will walk with you there. Amen.