

Sermon for June 6, 2021
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Today our Genesis text brings us back to the story of Adam and Eve. Imagine a round of Family Feud with this Bible story as the theme. For those of you who may not be familiar with that game show, contestants try to guess the top ten answers given in a national survey in response to each topic. If you were asked “Name something associated with the story of Adam and Eve,” what answers would you give?

Interestingly this actually was a Family Feud topic. Out of the 100 people surveyed:

58 said Apple

16 said Garden of Eden

12 said Snake

9 said Fig leaf

Were your words on the list?

Over half of the people surveyed, and I’m sure many of us, said apple. But quite surprisingly there is no mention of an apple in the original translations of the Bible. In Genesis we read that “Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” God puts man in the middle of this garden to till and to keep it. And commands “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden 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.”

Throughout the whole story the fruit of the tree is only referred to as “fruit”, never referenced as an apple. And while this little fun fact doesn’t really matter, I think it illustrates how easy it can be to misconstrue, add to, or assume things about Biblical stories, when we don’t take the time to actively engage with and live into the texts themselves.

A word I would have originally added to the list of words associated with this story is wrath, or punishment. Growing up I heard this text as a story of the rule God expects to be followed, the human sin that breaks the rule, and the wrath of God that follows. I would not have said that this text is one that illustrates the depth of God’s love and forgiveness. But over time in engaging and living into this text, I have discovered that while the text doesn’t include an apple, it does include God’s compassion and the gift of God’s unending grace.

Just prior to our reading today - God, recognizing that is it not good for man to be alone makes the human a partner, a helper. And we read “they were both naked and were not ashamed.” This is God’s creation: a world in which we are made to be in communion with one another, where we can expose our true selves without shame, in partnership to care for the world God has made. We know what happens next, humans eat the fruit from the one and only tree God

has not given them. Oh human nature – to always want more even when we are surrounded by abundance, to always want the one thing that is not good for us. This tree that stands in the middle of the garden is referred to as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent taunts, if you eat of this fruit you will know what God knows. Oh human nature - to want to be our own god, to long for knowledge instead of trust the Creator, to try to grasp and speak of the mystery that is beyond our understanding. Upon eating from the tree, we read their “eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.”

Immediately they try to hide themselves from one another and from God. And at this moment God comes “walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze”. I am struck by this image – the humans hiding, fearful and exposed – in contrast to the image of God steadily moving through the beauty of the garden amidst gentle breeze.

And here is God’s first act of grace. God asks “Where are you?” God gives the humans a chance to come forward and tell God what has happened. Adam gives a guarded response “I heard the sound of you in the garden and was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.” But God persists, inviting the humans once again into honest response. “Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat?” And here is where everything starts to unravel. Adam responds “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit.” Adam does not claim his own sin but rather blames it on his partner, “the other one in the garden, made me do it.” Moreover – he blames it on God “The one you gave me.” One must wonder how this story might have proceeded had Adam said “I did. Forgive me.”

God then gives the other human a chance to respond “What is this you have done?” But in similar fashion, she does not ask forgiveness but rather blames it on the serpent, another creation of God. God has offered an opportunity to confess sin, to claim failure to listen to God and to come before God weeping over the fear and shame that comes with thinking we know better than God, to defend one another. But we undo all that God has created us to be – no longer partner but accuser, no longer caretaker but set against, no longer openly in communion with God but hiding.

There are consequences for the actions – consequences for knowing what we were not meant to know, for acting like we were not created to act. Let us not forget God foretold them, warned them, what would naturally happen if they operated outside of the design of God’s creation. God doesn’t lift the people out of the mess they have created. But here is what is as surprising to some as the absence of the apple. In chapter 3 verse 21 it reads “and the Lord God made garments and clothed them.” Even in their sin, God provides for them – an act of a loving God. And hence we be too quick to call this a story of God’s wrath, if it really was only that, the Bible would end at Genesis chapter 3. But rather we hold a text that has another 43 chapters of Genesis and another 65 scriptural books because while the people must leave the garden, God does not leave the people. God’s presence goes with them. For even when we fail God, God does not fail God’s creation. God also still continues to urge the people forward to

live in the way they were created to live – in partnership and in care for the earth. God still gives them one another and land to care for. No apple, but lots of grace.

Let us not limit the learning from this text to one of sin and punishment. Let's receive this text as an invitation to live into God's grace. Oh human nature – in bondage to sin we cannot free ourselves – we sin against God in thought, word and deed by things we have done and things we have left undone – we reach for that fruit.

What or why are you hiding from God right now? Hear God say "Where are you?" Come before God and hear God ask "What have you done?" Can you hear that as a word of God's grace? Instead of giving into the temptation to blame the other, to blame the ways of creation, to blame God, to self-defend – are you willing to stand exposed before our grace filled God and confess your own failure, your own sin? Are we as a church willing to consider where God may be saying to us as a community "what have you done?" Can we respond not out of fear and defensiveness but rather trust God's grace and openly confess where we have failed to live as the people we have been created to be?

Today we celebrate our High School graduates. As we move out into the world of adulthood there will always be an abundance of opportunities to reach for the fruit and then to blame the other, to attribute problems to the way of creation, to get angry with God. We will always be tempted to defend our actions even when we have a sense that we have not lived into being who we were created to be. We can only be the people God has created us to be when we acknowledge before God and one another what we have done and what we have failed to. Then we are freed from hiding and freed for life as God intended. Life is full of consequences but God continues to come, to journey with us, to cloth us to live beyond the messes we create.

"Name something associated with the story of Adam and Eve"

No apples, but definitely our steadfast God.

As you exit the sanctuary today, I invite you to pick up an apple. May it serve as an invitation to take time this week to come fully before God, confessing your sin, being clothed for the realities that surround you, and strengthened to live in partnership with others to care for the world God has made.