

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church
 “Creation and Fall”

Scripture: Genesis 2:4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8; Psalm 119:1-8; Matthew 6:25-33
 Hymns: Morning has broken 814, Who made the earth and the heaven 339, You are
 Author 430, God, whose giving knows no ending (Tune: Beach Spring) 663
 September 11, 2016
 Rev. Steve Filyk

Many of our churches follow
 The Revised Common Lectionary.

While this lectionary exposes the congregation
 To a large swath of Scripture over its three-year cycle,
 Its design doesn’t always mesh with lives
 marked by summer holidays and school years.

Another noticeable liability
 Is that our foundational Old Testament stories
 Tend to get short shrift.ⁱ

Over the next couple of months
 I will be introducing you to the Narrative Lectionary,
 A Lutheran alternative,
 Which is gaining some momentum among pastors.

“[Its] texts include the major episodes in Scripture.
 [that] are arranged in a narrative sequence
 to help people see Scripture
 as a story that has coherence...”ⁱⁱ

This Sunday we start at the beginning:
 Creation and Fall.

Some of you may note that
 this isn’t actually the beginning.
 There is another creation story that begins
 In Genesis chapter one.

But chronology isn’t the only factor
 in the arrangement of our Bibles.

Scholars note that “the story before us
 could be as old as the tenth century B.C.E.,
 among the oldest parts of the Bible”
 and older than the story that precedes it.ⁱⁱⁱ

While Genesis chapter one
 Focuses on the “inherent goodness of creation”,
 Today’s complementary version focuses
 On “the complexities and ambiguities
 Of life within that good creation”.^{iv}

Today’s story is a familiar story.
 That has impacted many aspects of our culture.

It’s made a mark on our literature:
 Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*,
 Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*.^v

The story has even shaped one of the world’s
 Most famous logos—take a look at your iPhone!

Bible commentator and preacher William Willimon
 Notes how in a general way
 This story echoes our own experience in the world:

“Each human being, in our own intellectual growth and development,
 tends to recapitulate this ancient tale
 in our own growing awareness of ourselves and the world.

We begin in an uncomplicated way, unself-conscious,
 the two-year-old romping naked
 through the living room after a bath.

Then we grow up. Our eyes are opened.
 We see not just our nakedness,
 but also our vulnerability.”^{vi}

There is a lot for us to connect to in this story.
 Lots of different layers to probe
 Both in this ancient story and the history
 Of its interpretation.

But for today's purposes
 I'd like to consider what it teaches us about sin.

'Sin' is not a word that we use that often.
 It has been crowded out from one side
 By the legal system and from the other side
 By the medical profession.^{vii}

We talk about crimes and we talk about diseases
 But we rarely talk about 'sin'.

I was at a dinner the other day
 And the conversation darted around
 Topics of identity and sexuality and child-rearing.
 Somewhere along the line
 Someone stated what I think
 Is the clearest definition of conventional morality:

"I just don't want my kid
 to interfere with another kid's fun".

Sin, today, is often understood
 As poor manners,
 As misbehavior in the sandbox.

And yet the today's story from Genesis
 Gives morality and its breach,
 much broader dimensions:

Sin concerns our relationship with God,
 Our relationship with creation,
 And of course our relationship with each other.

Let me take you into the text,
 In particular verses 15 to 17.

After man is created
 God sets the terms for the thriving of humanity:

They are to care for the garden.
 They are given freedom to eat from the many trees.
 And there is also an exception:
 they are not to eat from the tree
 of the knowledge of good and evil.

As Biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman notes:
 "Human beings before God
 are characterised by **vocation, permission, and prohibition.**^{viii}
 We are given a job, we are given incredible freedom,
 And yet we are also given boundaries.

You know how the story goes.
 The first couple fails to trust in God's provision.
 They seek to live outside of God's good intention.
 They break the command and eat the forbidden fruit.
 They sin.

Once again Brueggeman notes:
 "The prohibition... is violated.
 The permission of... is perverted.
 The vocation of... is neglected.

There is no more mention of tending and feeding.
 They have no energy for that.
 Their interest has focused completely on self,
 on their new freedom
 and the terror that comes with it."^{ix}

Sin, living outside of God's intended purposes,
 Breaches our good relationship
 With God, with the earth,
 And as the story continues, with each other.

This story, not just a story of innocence and new awareness.
 It is a story of trust and broken relationships, of sin.
 And this story is one we all experience.

Let me tell the story again,
As told by Barbara Brown Taylor.

And while I do,
Spend a little time reflecting on how
You have experienced this story?

What was the prohibition you ignored?
What was the apple that tempted you?
And how has it impacted your relationships:
With God, with others, with God-given vocation.

In Taylor's own words:
"Before there was any such thing
as a Christian doctrine of original sin...

there was a story about a man and a woman
—the first man and woman—
who lived in a beautiful garden
full of peacocks and calla lilies and panda bears.

This paradise contained everything their hearts could desire,
including the close, sheltering presence of God.

There was only one thing in the whole garden
that they could not have,
only one thing that God had commanded them to leave alone,
and that was God's own tree.

"You may freely eat of every tree in the garden," God had told them,
"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.

So of course from that moment on
it was the only thing they wanted.
The fruit of that tree probably tasted better
than the fruit of all the other trees combined.

It probably tasted like a cross
between fresh pineapple and ripe cherries.

Plus, it clearly had magical powers.
Eating that fruit was what made God God,
which was why God did not want them to go
anywhere near it.

Or at least that was what the snake said.

The snake was a marvelous creature,
with a tongue like a pink silk banner
that rippled as he spoke.

He took a real interest in Adam and Eve.
He explained things to them, whereas God had not.
All God had really told them was to stay away from the tree,
but the snake told them why.

"You will not die," the snake said,
"for God knows that when you eat of it
your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil".

Then the snake left Adam and Eve alone
to make up their own mind.

It did not take them long.
In the first recorded act of humane initiative,
they decided for themselves
what was best for them.

They exercised their freedom
to disobey God's command,
ate the fruit,

and wound up standing on the curb outside the garden
with their battered suitcases lying beside them on the ground."^x

So how did you imagine yourself in the story?
 Was there an apple that tempted you?
 How has that affected your relationship with God and others?
 How has it affected your vocation?

Are you sitting outside the garden,
 At the curb?

Some would argue that this story
 Is intended as a sort of warning.
 A means of helping us see that God's laws, God's commands
 Are not arbitrary, but limits that allow us to thrive
 (third use of the law for you theologians).^{xi}

That is quite possible.

And yet I wonder if the purpose of the story
 Is to help us recognise our need for help, for rescue.
 The way the story is set before us
 We can't imagine the couple
 Keeping God's commandment.

In light of our own experiences
 We can also recognise that apart from some great assistance
 We can't recognise, let alone do what is best.^{xii}

The cliff-hanger at the end of this story.
 The cliff-hanger in the middle of our lives
 Is what will God do?
 What will God do about this terrible situation?

Thanks be to God
 That God will provide a way
 To repair our broken relationships.

More on that next week. Amen.

ⁱ See Chris Duckworth "Why I Left the Revised Common Lectionary Behind" The Lutheran Zephyr August 10, 2015 <https://lutheranzephyr.com/2015/08/10/why-i-left-the-revised-common-lectionary-behind/>

ⁱⁱ "What is the narrative lectionary" and "What are the readings"
http://www.workingpreacher.org/narrative_faqs.aspx

ⁱⁱⁱ William H. Willimon "First Sunday in Lent, Year A; Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts 8*

^{iv} "Lectionary Commentaries for September 11, 2016 Creation and Fall"
[workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

^v see "Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, 'Second Adam'" <http://crossref-it.info/articles/24/garden-of-eden-adam-and-eve-second-adam>

^{vi} William H. Willimon "First Sunday in Lent, Year A; Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts 9*

^{vii} see Barbara Brown Taylor *Speaking of Sin*

^{viii} Walter Brueggemann *Genesis 46*

^{ix} Walter Brueggemann *Genesis 48*

^x Barbara Brown Taylor *Speaking of Sin 43,44*

^{xi} this is the far agenda according to Walter Brueggemann *Genesis 51*

^{xii} see Paul's lament in Romans 7:15