

Genesis 3:1-13, 20-24

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^[a] knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The man named his wife Eve^[c] because she was the mother of all living. And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man^[d] and for his wife and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, "See, the humans have become like one of us, knowing good and evil, and now they might reach out their hands and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever"— therefore the Lord God sent them forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which they were taken. He drove out the humans, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

We love a good snake, don't we? What I mean by that is that we love to have something to blame.

In our passage this morning, Adam and Eve, newly created, are given a commandment from God, to avoid the fruit from one particular tree. While God rests on the first ever sabbath, obviously a bit tired after creating everything, a snake comes along urging them to take a bite.

The snake becomes a good excuse for why Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command. And we empathize. It's nice to have someone to blame. We might blame circumstances, or politicians, or our bosses, or the state of the economy, or even our bad knee when things don't quite go our way. Things happen. But our first impulse is often to figure out what to blame, rather than owning our mistakes. We search for the snake, to point our fingers and lay the blame. And the scariest times of our lives are when we can't find a

snake to blame.

My kids were excited to learn a few years ago that as a young child, at a family reunion, I pulled the hotel fire alarm while playing with my cousins. I'm not sure why I did it. Perhaps it was part of a game we were playing, or maybe I was just curious about what would happen. Either way, I did not expect the terrifying sounds that followed, the expressions on my parent's faces when I told them what had happened, or the nervousness I felt when my parents had me apologize to the firefighters who showed up at the hotel within a few minutes. The worst part was that there was no one to blame. No one had dared me to pull the alarm, nothing had tricked me into doing something that was wrong. I really could have used a snake.

Last week Rabbi Ostrich reminded us to look for wisdom, insights, and possibilities as we journey through the book of Genesis. We stumble when we try to make these sacred passages into a history or science text book - that's not the point. Much of Genesis, including the Creation narratives and Adam and Eve story, were folk stories carried down generation after generation to help the Hebrew people understand their origin and place in the world. The name Adam, often written in Hebrew in the book of Genesis as Ha'adam, literally translates as human being. Eve, likewise in the Hebrew language, haw'wāh, literally translates as living. So together they are a living human being.

In their book, *Genesis for Normal People (BOOK)*, Pete Enns and Jared Byas point out the similarities between Adam and Eve's tragic downfall, and the Israelites stumbling when they also choose to ignore God's commands. Adam is created out of dust, the Israelites out of slavery. Adam is given a perfect garden, the Israelites are offered a land of plenty. Things are good as long as God's commands are followed, but exile happens when they do not.

But something shifted for me this week when I read this story again. I noticed that while God was clearly disappointed in Adam and Eve, God did not confront the snake - at least not in the pages of Genesis. God wasn't terribly concerned with who had done the trickery, but wanted to hear from those who had strayed from his command. God wanted to hear from Adam and Eve, to understand why they had chosen that particular path.

The other piece of this story that stood out for me was that their sin was not so much a sinful act - no one today would say that being able to distinguish between good and evil was something sinful. Instead it was done out of God's intended order.

In Michelle Obama's biography, "Becoming," (BOOK) she recounts an early experience of taking piano lessons. She explains that she grew up playing piano on an old instrument that had a chip on the middle C key. Some of you may empathize with learning on second hand equipment, but for Michelle this was a strength. You see she never had trouble finding her way with that chipped and flawed key. It gave her a bit of false confidence as she was learning, that she was perhaps more advanced than she was. Growing bored with the slow pace of her teacher's instruction, she skipped ahead in her beginner piano book to the more difficult pieces at the end. With pride, she showed her teacher at her next lesson what she had learned, only to discover her teacher's anger and sadness that she had skipped ahead without learning some more basic principles that would help her in the long term.

Perhaps this is how it was with God. These created humans thought themselves more prepared for the tree of knowledge than they actually were. It wasn't that what they were doing was wrong, it was skipping ahead in their journey, faster than God had intended.

Back to a young Michelle Obama - after months of practice, she finally had her first piano recital. Nervously she made her way up to the shiny grand piano that all the new players would be using, feeling the gaze of all who had gathered to support her. She looked down at the keys and froze. A long row of perfect, identical, white piano keys. What was she to do now? After a much too long pause, she felt her teacher's presence behind her. She took her small hand, and guided her right index finger to the correct starting point.

Perhaps this is an ideal metaphor for the way God walks with us, even in our overconfidence, and desire to do things outside of God's intended plan.

As I was talking through this idea with a friend this week, she pointed me to Cole Arthur Riley's powerful book, This Here Flesh (BOOK). In its pages Riley points out that at the moment of shame and brokenness, when Adam and Eve feel their nakedness and separation from God, God makes them some clothes. Our scripture from this morning says, "the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them" Yes, you heard that right. When humanity failed, God acknowledged their misstep, and then knelt and became a seamstress. Our Peace Table Bible (SLIDE) suggests that God's clothes allowed Adam and Eve to not be so ashamed around God. Perhaps that's true.

The snake, or whatever excuse they may have had, becomes irrelevant with an empathetic and understanding God. I hope we carry that message with us in our daily

lives - searching not for the snakes to blame, but for the guides and teachers who offer us help, even when we mess up or take the wrong path.

Yet we know that we will look for snakes to blame when we do take the wrong path. It's why we gather together each week, to share in each other's lives, and to see glimpses of God in each other, offering us forgiveness, empathy, and perhaps even something to comfort us when we fall short.

As a symbol of finding life amid our brokenness, from time to time we gather around the Lord's Table and share Communion with one another, as we will here this morning.

Communion is a remembrance of Jesus' last meal with his friends and followers. As we prepare our hearts and minds, I invite you to join me in an invitation from our hymnal. You can find this reading on the screen, as well as in our Voices Together Hymnal, number 937. I chose this pledge of love for us to share this morning, because it reminds me that we're not searching for snakes. We're longing for love in the midst of our missteps. So please join me as we begin our communion time together.

937 *Preparation for Communion—Pledge of Love*

Leader: Friends,
as we gather to eat the bread and drink the cup,
let us respond with the pledge of love.

Will you love God before all things,
in the power of God's living Word,
and join yourself to God's way?

All: *By the grace of God, I will.*

Leader: Will you love and serve our neighbors,
and lay down your life through the power of Jesus Christ,
who laid down his life for us?

All: *By the grace of God, I will.*

Leader: Will you support and challenge one another,
speak and hear the truth,
cease what causes harm to our neighbors,
and do good to our enemies?

All: *By the grace of God, I will.*

Leader: May the Spirit of God
who calls the church to Christ's Supper
give us the grace, strength, and patience
to live this pledge of love.

All: *Amen.*

I invite our communion servers to come and join me.

Friends, this is Christ's Table. Bread is provided for our physical bodies, providing us with the nourishment we need. God's body, broken for us. The Wine, or the grape juice that we share with each other, is fuel for our spirits to thrive. This is God's spirit, poured out for us.

Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit at the table in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus was at the table with his disciples he took the bread and cup and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

This is the Lord's table. It is open and accessible to all who wish to partake in the gluten free bread and juice, we also have a bowl of grapes on the table if you prefer. Come, all

are welcome. We will come forward, and take the elements back to our seats to eat together.

And as we share it together, we remember that on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread saying, this is my body. Whenever you eat, do so in remembrance of me.

Likewise, Jesus took a cup saying, this is my blood, the blood of life. Whenever you drink from this cup, do so in remembrance of me.

Friends, siblings in Christ, thank you for sharing this communion table.

Creator God, we thank You for the privilege of coming to Your table and partaking in the cup and bread of life. May we always take to heart the importance of this sacrament and live our lives in a way that reflects Your goodness and mercy.

We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Friends, as we move now into sharing, to share in each other's lives, we will move to our Glimpses of Joy moment in our service, the video formerly known as the Prelude.

Doug will come forward following these pictures and videos, to lead us in our time of sharing.