

Lent 1 – 1 March 2020 First there was Adam, Now there's Jesus

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, yet in fact not the first day, as we have been in the season of Lent since last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday.

In today's readings we hear a parallel of two stories; both have to do with humanity being tested and both have to do with repercussions for their actions.

The Hebrew Scripture today speaks about the place we have come to know as the Garden of Eden. We hear God telling the Woman and her Husband "And the LORD God commanded the man, "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." (Genesis 2.16-17, NRSV)

Isn't that always the way? At any other time, they would happily eat the fruit of the trees, and not be concerned or perhaps even curious about the fruit of the tree of good and evil. Yet at soon as God says you CANNOT have it...what do you want? Power of suggestion, such as watching television and an advertisement for Dairy Queen comes on...suddenly, there's a craving for ice cream.

The thing is, God lied to the Man and Woman.

The serpent, who is almost always pictured as cunning and evil simply "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, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3.5, NRSV) In other words he's telling her...it's okay, have the fruit. What's the worst that could happen. You aren't going to die. Go on...live a little!

So, of course, the Woman "took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate." (Genesis 3.6, NRSV) And they declared it delicious. And all of a sudden they could see as God would see. They knew what God knows...the look down and instead of innocence, suddenly they feel shame. They realise they are naked.

Have you ever noticed, it's quite natural to see a baby or young child in his or her underwear at the splash pad on a hot day? They don't have a bathing suit, but that's okay, they can run around in their underwear or in nothing at all. Nobody bats an eye. And yet, at a certain age it's no longer considered acceptable to be naked, especially in public.

Did you notice in the first reading that we don't know the names of the Woman and her Husband? He is referred to as "man" twice, as "husband" once and she is referred to as woman four times. What has always irritated me is that the Woman, who we come to know as Eve is vilified by God in this story. She is given the brunt of the blame.

She gave the fruit to her Husband, who, in Hebrew is called "ha'adam" literally "of the Earth, or Earthling". The Woman is known as the helper or help-mate. They don't receive their names until after they are expelled from the garden.

To recap, Man is given the Garden of Eden to tend and is given Woman as his help-mate. They are told they can eat anything they want, except the fruit of the tree of good and evil. If they eat that fruit, God says they will die.

Fast forward a little bit and they DO eat the fruit. And they DO NOT die. At least not in a physical sense. They do lose their innocence. And because they have gone against God's instruction they are expelled. They realise they are naked and they are ashamed. They realise that they now know the difference between good and evil.

They made a choice to eat the forbidden fruit. And their repercussion was exile.

Going next to Matthew's gospel, it picks up right after Jesus is baptised. In Matthew's gospel we are told the spirit of God landed on Jesus in bodily form. This same spirit, after the festivities of baptism "led [Jesus] up into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished." (Matthew 4.1-2, NRSV) This same Holy Spirit took Jesus from public affirmation and recognition to temptation. For forty days.

I'm thinking that if I had fasted for forty days I'd be famished too, and likely quite cranky. Jesus has been preparing for battle. He has just been baptised and is ready to go public with his earthly ministry. He's aware, because of scripture, that he will be tested and so he's ready. Jesus is tempted three ways.

Temptation Number One: After forty days in the wilderness Satan says, you've got to be hungry. If you are the Son of God, make these stones into bread. Jesus answers "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4.4, NRSV)

In other words, I don't have to prove anything to you, Satan. I will not cheapen my relationship with God with silly parlour tricks. Try again.

Temptation Number Two: Satan takes Jesus to the Holy City, places him on the roof of the temple and tells him, again, that if he really is the Son of God, he could throw himself down and God would not let him fall to his death. Jesus answers "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4.7, NRSV)

In other words, listen, Satan, I don't need to prove who I am to you or anyone else. Try again.

Temptation Number Three: Satan tries his most tantalizing trick yet. He has saved the biggest temptation for last. He takes Jesus to the highest point of the mountain and gestures for him to take a look around. All this could be yours, Satan purrs. You would be master of all you survey, and all you would have to do is kneel down and worship me. Surely that cannot be too difficult. Jesus says "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." (Matthew 4.10, NRSV)

In other words, Satan, dude, you've got it all wrong. I don't want earthly power. I don't want to serve you. I want only to serve my God, my Father, who is in Heaven.

Jesus was tested with earthly weakness through physical hunger.

He was tested with earthly strength through physical danger.

And he was tested with earthly riches through physical temptation.

Jesus resisted all of these, holding strong to what he knew to be true.
In other words,
"Not today Satan...NOT today!"

Jesus made the choice to abstain and was rewarded with eternal life. Don't get me wrong, it got way worse for Jesus before it got better.

Like Adam, Jesus was tested. Unlike Adam, Jesus is not fall into temptation. Adam's repercussion was exile from paradise. Jesus repercussion was a promise that paradise would be his for eternity.

This is teased out in Paul's letter to the Church in Rome. Paul speaks to the faithful in Rome; first of Adam, who brought sin into the world before there was law. Remember, Adam was created to be God made manifest on earth. Adam was tempted and failed, spectacularly. And so that experiment was shelved for quite a long time.

Paul says, "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all." (Romans 5.18, NRSV)

Trespass meaning the commission of sin, of being tried or tested and found wanting.

Adam was tested and failed. And because of this all humanity was condemned. Eventually God tried again with Jesus. And when Jesus was tempted he passed spectacularly. God made manifest through a young woman called Mary who gave birth to Jesus was the last ditch effort for the salvation of humanity.

Adam tried and got it wrong. Jesus tried and got it right. Which is why, on occasion, Jesus is referred to as the New Adam. Paul says, "For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5.19, NRSV)

Those who followed Adam died a physical death. Those who follow Jesus receive the gift of eternal life. There will be a physical death. Yet as followers of Jesus, as believers in God, as those comforted by the Holy Spirit; we are assured that we will, one day, see those who have gone before us.

And so we move through this penitential season, a season of repentance. It's not meant for us to feel like miserable sinners. This season of repentance is meant for us, who get things wrong, to feel apologetic for getting it wrong and making a promise – making a commitment to do better.

We are not created to be perfect. We are created human. We are frail, sometimes weak and often unaware of our actions. When we recommit ourselves to follow in the ways of God, we allow ourselves to look deep into our soul. We promise to try better to be the children of God we are called to be, and for which we are created.

Let this season of Lent be for us a season of intention, a season of correction, a season of asking for and being granted forgiveness.

Let all God's children say "Amen"

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Genesis 2.15-17, 3.1-7

Romans 5.12-19

Matthew 4.1-11