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Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;

2:17 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."

3:1 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?'"

3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;

3:3 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.'"

3:4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die;

3:5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

3:6 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.

Continuing past the Lectionary:

3:7 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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." ¹³ 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."

Proclamation of the Word

Sooner or later we learn a frightening lesson that we have limits and responsibilities.

We realize that at some point we must learn how to "adult." Yes, "adult-ing" is now a word.

Spellcheck does not know yet, because it changed it to *adulating*.

In the heady days of youth we imagine all the possibilities of our lives. We imagine that we might grow up to be this or that. We dream about where we might go to college and what we might study, marrying the person of our dreams, of landing the perfect job, of creating the life we can imagine. The possibilities seem endless.

Then somewhere along the way, we rub our eyes, wipe the sleep out of them, look in the mirror and think, here am I. This is the person I have become. Alas, I am an adult. How did I end up here? I have a mortgage, kids to provide for, a job which requires me to show up and work hard, less freedom than I pictured. I have health issues or a child with challenges. My spouse gets cancer. These are the limits and responsibilities that life has laid upon me. We could become discontent, dissatisfied.

But if this is an uncomfortable thought *for us* to have, it is a boon to the advertising industry as they tell us how to overcome our limits. There is a fix for your discontent.

Scholar Scott Hoezee asks,

How many advertisements proffer Fountain of Youth, Defy Old Age, Lose Weight Fast, Amaze Your Friends, Become Your Own Boss, Fire Your Boss, Secure Your Financial Future... Whether it's a set of stock market tips, a drug, a diet program, facial cream to get rid of wrinkles, or some mysterious elixir that is said to work wonders, the bottom line is forever the same: we can improve you. You don't need to...<accept your limits>

It's all a lie, of course, which is maybe why the next most common set of advertisements we see are...ⁱ

...for anxiety drugs and stress management routines, because we cannot fix the human condition ourselves.

But more than just this or that specific facet of our lives, we and people everywhere just generally have the sense that something's not right. We're not home, we're not where we are supposed to be. Our world is not as it should be.

The title of the first section of the Reformed confession The Heidelberg Catechism is "Human Misery," but the original title in German was "Elend." "Elend" in German does mean "misery" but the word itself carries with it the whiff of being an exile, feeling the kind of misery that comes when you are stranded far from home and can't get back. It's not just that we humans often feel we are not what we want to be but also that we are not where we ought to be, either.

Such is the mystery of sin. When we are not at home and know something is wrong, we seek relief. We want freedom from the discontent or pain so we are tempted to try something, anything that will bring comfort. Or as in the case of Adam and Eve, they are looking for more- looking to know more, understand more. In the garden where the tree of good and evil grows, Adam and Eve know full well the limits set for them by God. They have been told they have all they need and to trust God. They are perfectly at home in Eden and in relationship with God. Only one limitation, no eating from that one tree.

We may feel the weight of the limits or responsibilities placed upon us so we push the limits. Some of us are just never content with what we have or what we know or with trusting God.

It doesn't help Adam and Eve that the serpent who lives in God's garden is there spouting lies. "Just think for yourself! Act for Yourself! You don't need to listen to God. Just take it if you want it." Notice that the serpent is friendly and does not scare Adam and Eve. They are interested, enthralled even. What he is peddling sounds pretty good... sounds attractive and captivating. They are deceived. They take him up on the offer and eat the fruit of the tree. They disobey God's command.

You see, Adam and Eve were not content with their limits or responsibilities. They want freedom without consequences. They assume the role of God. They believe the lies they have been fed. They want to be God, not limited human beings. They want freedom without limits.

God knows that freedom without limits leads to messy divorces, shouting matches between parents and teens, a willful disregard for the needs and feelings of the other, exploitation, and the degradation of the environment. And in the case of Adam and Eve, they do not take God at God's word. They do not trust God. They disobey. While the word "sin" is never used, the relationship with God is broken. When they hear God walking in the Garden, Adam and Eve hide from God- ashamed in their nakedness, their disobedience.

But the good news is that God stays faithful to the ones he has made in Love. God is trustworthy and faithful like the responsible adult in the relationship. It is the humans who hide from God pointing fingers and placing blame. Adam says, "Eve made me." Eve says, "the Serpent made me." They are all at fault.

That kind of blaming, name calling, and lack of responsibility is something we see daily on the news and in our political environment. The Creation that God made is good, and the people that God created in love still suffer the consequences of brokenness and sin.

The good news is that truth telling can set us free. It is the blame and lies that lead to broken relationships and broken trust. In facing the truth, confessing our part in it, we are once more reconciled. Confession and truth-telling builds TRUST. God desires a right relationship with us.

And this is also how we are to treat our relationships with others. The other way leads to death or *misery God warns*.

In her article entitled, "A Long Obedience," in an issue of The Christian Century, Katherine Willis Pershey writes about fidelity, "It is strange to think of a particular person as the person with whom I did not have an affair ... And yet there is one man I cannot help but think of as the man with whom I did not cheat on [my husband] Benjamin. We had no improper physical contact, no inappropriately intimate conversations. I don't even know if the attraction was mutual. There was, however, temptation. I felt desire ... When I realized that I had feelings for this man, I was shocked. I dearly love my husband, to whom I have been married — mostly happily, and decidedly faithfully — for more than a decade. I almost didn't recognize the crush for what it was, it had been such a long time since I'd had one. It was disorienting, terrifying, the slightest bit exhilarating — like being on a roller coaster but knowing full well that upon hitting the last loop-de-loop, your car will derail and you will plunge to your death. My

internal alarms all tripped at once, clanging an overwhelming and persuasive warning. Danger, danger ... I did the only thing I could fathom:

I told my husband everything. Even though there wasn't much to tell — oh, how profoundly glad I was to go to him with a clean conscience! — the conversation was risky. Would it wound Benjamin to know that his wife, though delivered from temptation, had experienced it? Yes, it did. But it was a hurt he could sustain, because he understood that at the root of what I was telling him was that I was trustworthy. I had been tested and proven faithful.”ⁱⁱ

Truth-telling in love, while hard sometimes, is critical to relationships. We have all seen the damage LIES can do, breeding mistrust, in marriages, in positions of responsibility and power, in relationships between groups of us.

God desires the same truth-telling from us. Life comes with limits and boundaries. And life also comes with responsibilities. Here we are talking about "adulting" again. A part of sin- We forget our place in God's creation. God places the man in the garden of Eden in order to do what? **to till and keep it.**

Actually, the best translation of the Hebrew is to **“Serve and Protect”**ⁱⁱⁱ the garden and its inhabitants. That is our God-given purpose. **Serve and Protect** is what good stewards do. We care for the earth and all its inhabitants. We care for the people in the world God made, not just people from whom we have something to gain, but to whom we have a responsibility. We care for our families, our communities, our neighbors.

Notice God did not place man in the Garden of Eden for a tropical vacation- sipping fruity drinks, lounging in the sun, and spending hours lost entertaining himself on Netflix. God places people on the earth to Serve and Protect it. But we do not do it alone. God gives us partners. We are partners with God, partners with each other, and are called to live in harmony with the earth.

Thankfully when the tempter confronts the Second Adam, Jesus, the outcome is quite different, according to the gospel lesson the Lectionary appoints for this Sunday- the temptation of Jesus in the desert. While temptation comes in a different place in different shapes, it's no less apparently attractive. Yet, praise God, Jesus, the Second Adam succeeds where the first fails so miserably. Jesus begins his earthly ministry by successfully resisting the evil one's temptations. With his victory he begins, in a sense, to lead Adam and Eve's sons and daughters back to the Garden from which God had banished our first parents. It is through Christ, that we find our true purpose and our true home in right relationship with God and in harmony with our neighbors and all of Creation.

ⁱ Scott Hoezee, Sermon Starters - See more at: <http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/lent>

ⁱⁱ IBID.

ⁱⁱⁱ As usual, I am indebted to *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Lent to Easter*. Notes “serve” is also “slave” but serve makes sense in our context.