

Remember Whose you Are

Lent 1A

Fort Hill Presbyterian

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

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 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."

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, 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.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Proclamation of the Word

"Liar, liar, pants on fire." We used to say on the school playground. Kids are sticklers for truth-telling and lies. Truth and lies are so clear. But as we grow, discerning truth and lies becomes a challenge. Lies become more subtle.

News stories get passed around the Internet. We receive chain emails and many believe them. We have a relatives who likes to send us these emails, things like Baby carrots are really made from deformed, full-sized carrots soaked in chlorine or Bigfoot was shot and killed by a hunter in San Antonio or insert whatever politician you despise and you can find a rumor about him or her, to which Chuck goes to snopes.com and kindly corrects the rumor. What is true and what are lies are hard to discern on the information super highway sometimes.

I just read an article about a Silicon Valley, Presbyterian mega-church asking to be dismissed to the ECO: Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians who characterized our church and all PCUSA churches and its members as those who don't believe in the deity of Jesus Christ or the authority of Scripture. Truth or lie?

I disagree with such a categorical statement. And while there are those who question and wrestle thoughtfully and faithfully with who Jesus is, from where I sit faithful Presbyterian Christians are seeking to understand and live out their lives trusting in Jesus who is the Son of God. What I read, offends me. What is true? What are the lies?

Lent is a time when the days lengthen and we journey toward the cross of Jesus Christ and the celebration of the hope of Resurrection on Easter. It is most of all a time to examine ourselves, seek repentance, and grow in the love and knowledge of God and God's intentions for all of us. To use the language of Greek fraternities and sororities, it began as a sort of pledge season. Lent was a time of study, preparation, and self-reflection for those preparing to profess their faith and be Baptized. It was an intense time of examination. They were Christians-in-training. But aren't we all Christians-in-training?

Barbara Brown Taylor in her sermon on Lent reminds us that the word Lent does not appear in the Bible, but was created by the church. It is a churchy thing. When the followers of Jesus got tired of waiting for him to come back, they just got back to business as usual- so much for a bold witness, martyrdom, healing the sick, and speaking out for the poor, broken, and marginalized. They got comfortable and fit in. Taylor writes that our ancestors in the faith, "decided to be nice instead of holy and God moaned out loud" (*Home by Another Way*).

So the church decided to live into the Bible and focus on 40. Forty years Israel spent wandering in the wilderness, 40 days the Elijah and Jesus spent in the wilderness, to recover their soul. Those 40 days and years were periods of suffering, hunger, loneliness. We learn to allow our empty souls to be filled with the presence of God and our hungers to be filled with the Bread of Life, completely and utterly dependent on God, not ourselves. Lent is a period of renewal for the soul- a springtime for our souls.

We need a spring cleaning, a total makeover, a spiritual cleansing.

We become empty so that the holy of holies that resides in our souls can be filled with the presence of God.

So we have to get real honest with the pacifiers and addictions that we use to fill that empty space that belongs to God.

We wrestle with our own truth, repent and change, so that we can rest in the truth of God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Which means we must wrestle with sin and lies, especially the lies we tell ourselves.

In the Genesis passage today, we find ourselves in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and the Serpent. The serpent is a lying liar.

He whispers seductively, "God didn't tell you everything- self-sufficiency, wholeness, and power are right here within your grasp."

Humans, not content with what they had, feeling incomplete, and wanting more, grab for the fruit that they think will make them secure, totally sufficient.

It is from this text that we, the church, came up with the doctrine of original sin.

But maybe another way to say it, is that we human being have an original insecurity problem which is an original sinⁱ. Maybe original sin has more to do with the fact that we do not want to depend on God, but ourselves, so we quickly fill up our hungers, act like we have no need, and tell ourselves that we are our own masters.

But what if that emptiness, loneliness, and need are there by design to make room for God?

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal suggests that we all have a "God-shaped hole" in our lives.

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in humanity a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This we try in vain to fill with everything around us, seeking in things that are not there the help we cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God alone.ⁱⁱ

No matter how hard we try, nothing else can fill that God-shaped hole.

Adam and Eve try to overcome insecurity by taking the fruit that they thought would satisfy that craving instead of a real, trusting relationship with the living God. No matter how many likes we get on Facebook or Instagram or how many followers we have on Twitter, no matter how we try to fill that emptiness with shopping or food or substance

.....or any other addiction like work or power or pious, self-righteousness, nothing can fill that hole in our lives until we have embrace that relationship with our loving Creator.

The lying liars are all around. PBS produced a Frontline episode entitled "The Persuaders" about advertising in our culture. There was a time when ads dealt with the quality of the product.

"Have a tough laundry stain? Shout it out!" or the battle cry of Ford is "Built Ford tough."

Now, advertising is less about the quality of product, and more about selling you a lifestyle, a story.

Subaru- "Love. It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru"

Commercial: First day of school for little girl, Dad in suit ready for work, asks her if she is ready for her first day? and then puts her on the bus with a kiss. Then he jumps in his Subaru and say's "I'm over-protective. That's why I got a Subaru." and follows the School bus, pulling up beside his daughter's seat. Then he sees his little girl laughing with a new friend through the bus window. Voiceover "Love...."

We are supposed to think, "I want that lifestyle. I want a Subaru. I want LOVE."

That will fill that God-shaped hole that brings me meaning, purpose, and love. And then we realize that in the end it's just a car, a truck, a stain remover.

It is in the Desert of our hungers and need we go face to face with struggle and toe to toe with the liars, the serpents, the devils, the satan, that try to deceive us. In Greek the word "satan" means the deceiver or liar. Truth is: "God is the source of Love, not a Subaru." We must tell the truth.

On Ash Wednesday night we came face to face with the reality of our mortality. I spoke to a very honest older member last week who said, "no matter where you live now, no matter how big or fine your house, we all end up with a hole six feet deep." That's some truth-telling. On Ash Wednesday as each person came forward, the pastor would place the sign of the cross on each person saying from Deuteronomy, "You are dust and to dust you shall return." And each person responded, "In life and in death, I belong to God."

Because that is what in the end is true and right. We define ourselves not by what we have, but by whose we are. In life and in death, we belong to God.

Jesus knew this and showed us best of all what it means to belong to God. Still dripping wet from his own Baptism in the Jordon, Jesus embarks on his own Outward Bound adventure, not to discover self-reliance, but to bet it all on God. Doused with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is told, "You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased." That is the voice still ringing in Jesus' ears as he enters the desert to face the lies of the devil. Jesus' surest defense rests in his knowing who he was and whose he was, the Son of the Father.

As David Lose writes:ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice, too, that Jesus resists this temptation not through an act of brute force or sheer will, but rather by taking refuge in an identity founded and secured through his relationship with God, a relationship of absolute dependence on God and identification with all others.

Jesus will be content to be hungry as others are hungry, dependent on God's Word and grace for all good things. He will be at risk and vulnerable as are all others, finding safety in the promises of God. And he will refuse to define himself or seek power apart from his relationship with God, giving his worship and allegiance only to the Lord God who created and sustains him.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Unlike Adam and Eve Jesus knows who he is and whose he is. There was no insecurity in Jesus. When the devil suggests, "If you are the Son of God.." Jesus is ready to respond to his "ifs" with confidence and trust. Jesus shows us who we are, too. We belong to God. As we follow Jesus on this Lenten road, Jesus journeys toward a cross not to make God love us or to make us acceptable. Jesus died on a cross to show us that God already loves us, desires to be reconciled to us, and to show us the way of to the real fullness of life.

Now that is truth we can trust and believe.

This Lent, let's all give up something- INSECURITY- and rest in the truth of God's grace, providence, and love.

Prayer: We believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.

ⁱThanks to David Lose, "Identity Theft" at workingpreacher.com

ⁱⁱ Blaise Pascal, *Pensee 10.148*

ⁱⁱⁱ Lose, IBID.