

The Blame Game & Mission Possible
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Genesis 3:1-21

Do you ever have that dream, the one where you are sitting in a classroom waiting to take a final exam and you realize you forgot to study for it? I have. Mine has me sitting in a math course that I need in order to graduate from UCONN. Sometimes, when I'm really worried about something in real life, the dream will happen with a fun twist... I'm naked in it! How embarrassing!

The creation story in Genesis ends that way in chapter two: The man and the woman were both naked. And happy! Unlike my dream, there is no shame or embarrassment, no grasping for fig leaves to hide behind. At least not yet. They had nothing to hide! They were human beings, created in God's image, bodies and spirits -- whole selves -- made with careful purpose! And as the author keeps telling us... it was good. This is a most important element of the creation story in Genesis: everything that was made, every animal, every tree, every beam of sunlight... was good.

So just in case you were thinking that God created human beings as some kind of social experiment or toy to be played with... well, the story tells us it's just not true. God doesn't say: *Well, it's done. There it is, let's step back and see what happens.* Rather, God says: *Here it is ... and it is good!*

So what happened?

Good is not always the world we know. In our experience, intimacy can be easily cut down by shame and fear and betrayal; peace is disturbed by suspicion and hatred and greed; shalom is replaced by struggle and suffering and death.

And we know the natural world is in crisis today. There's a floating plastic garbage pile in the middle of the ocean that is as big as a country. Climate change, with more and more dangerous weather patterns, droughts and melting icecaps are affecting vulnerable populations. Just yesterday, the blue macaw, another of God's creatures was pronounced extinct.

So what happened? That's what today's reading tries to answer, at least in part.

Although the technology and customs have changed, the truth is that the Hebrew people lived in a similar world as the one we now live in. They hid under many of the same shadows and they asked many of the same questions. The book of Genesis is a creation story told backwards, from the perspective of this terrifying and exhilarating exodus experience that forged them as a people.

And it's not meant to be a legitimate history lesson of the world as it was, but rather a morality tale that points to why things are the way that they are.

The church hasn't always handled this notion of original sin well. There are many among us who were told this story as children and made to feel foundationally bad; like we were sinful, broken, fallen. We're all just waiting for (as my friend Vaughan likes to call it) "the celestial dope slap". All because a long, long time ago two people made a decision that didn't go well. Some people feel that the theological term, "sin", is synonymous with human nature.

Churches like ours begin worship with a Confession of Sin, because we look at all the problems in this world and we know that we need to change course. Besides, everybody can benefit from the opportunity to reflect on our own failures, mistakes and apathy, and to own up to it. So that we can do better.

The Bible does not say that sin is our main problem. There are many others, like spiritual blindness, exile, or other conditions that trap and prevent us from being whole & healthy – all of which carry the potential to separate us from the love of God.

The separation begins when we turn from honoring God's values to saying that we have a better sense of priorities. When we allow some snake to tell us what to do, or we ourselves become snake-like and decide we know what is true better than God, we separate ourselves from love & compassion.

When we act out of our own self-interest at the expense of our community, or our natural environment, then we are living in a state of sin.

When we try and act like we are God, we cause bigger problems, and the solution is not simply to be forgiven. What we need is a deep transformation of our priorities and an awareness of what life is really all about.

Living a meaningful, worthwhile life is about growing in love and compassion, instead of obsessing about how we need more comfort and security at the expense of everyone else in the world.

People in bondage need liberation, not just personal forgiveness of their sins. People who are outcasts need acceptance in community. People who are sick need healing.

We don't like to call out the "social sins" of racism, sexism, oppression, materialism or slavery in all its contemporary forms; but these forces cause us to treat our fellow human beings as superficial objects devoid of love, given or received.

We need transformation and reconciliation to reconnect ourselves with our Creator, but in order to do that we need to grow beyond the blame game. Then, and only then, can we hear the Bible describing the ways we need to be working to help people in bondage, in exile, and in need of healthy minds & bodies.

Adam & Eve knew better, but they ate anyway ... and everything that was good was no more the same. They yearned to become what they were not because they became ashamed of what they were!
In their shame, they blamed each other and blamed God.

The story of the fall isn't some great cosmic drama. It's not a supernatural struggle between the forces of good and evil! This story takes place here on earth, not in the heavens. We're not really caught in the crossfire of some great celestial conflict; we just suffer the consequences of broken trust. When trust is broken, the first thing we do is blame each other...

The snake tricked you? Wrong! You knew exactly what you were doing! You knew exactly what God said.

She gave it to you? It's her fault? Wrong! You knew exactly what you were doing! You knew exactly what God said.

The Devil made you do it? Wrong! The Devil has nothing to do with this story. The story is about a man and a woman and the choices we make. We are enticed by pride. We want to make all the decisions and pull all the strings. We choose to disobey.

And yet... the story is not without a measure of hopefulness. Think about it! Yes, we live in a world which can seem broken in so many ways. But hatred and greed and suffering are not part of the natural fabric of creation -- they are intrusions. The natural fabric of creation is intimacy and peace and shalom. The imbalance of power between men and women is not part of God's design, but a result of damaged trust.

And if this is not the way things must be, then things might be able to be molded differently. The brokenness of creation can be healed. There is hope!

When the man and the woman were discovered in their betrayal, what did God do? God revealed the real consequences of their choices, and then clothed them. What does God do when we betray the trust invested in us? God does not spare us the consequences -- to do so would rob us of our responsibility, our identity, our very being.

But when we live a life of compassionate service and care for others, sharing the love of Christ, we are free to live as a new creation.

Life that is good is God's gift. We may spoil it when we turn our backs on God and to each other and to creation itself. And when we do, we deprive ourselves of the intimacy and joy God intends for us.

But what if, we didn't? What if we looked around at all the places we see that have hope and new life, so that we could remember the goodness and joy that God intends for us all? All the little broken bits might come together with God's love. If we all were able to do just that, think of how we might change the world.

This summer, I asked you as a congregation to send me photos of places and people you have encountered that inspire hope, to help us understand that God's mission of love and joy are really possible. At this time, let's inspire one another by sharing them. Remember, God's creation is beloved, and you are a beloved child of God.