

“Disconnected”
(The Wilderness of Disconnection)
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7, 22-24
Rev. Chris Mereschuk
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Prayer...

Things were good in those early days of the Garden of Eden. God had set up quite a lovely place for this Creation experiment, and brought forth living creatures of every kind: cattle to roam around, fish to stock the seas, winged birds of every kind to fly above the earth and across the dome of the sky, wild animals, and creeping things that creep upon the ground of every kind.

And God saw that it was good.¹

Then God needed some kind of creature to care for all these other creatures and the whole of Creation. God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”²

(They wrote that same line three times — we ought to pay attention!)

In another version of the story, God creates male and female separately. First, God creates the man — Adam — by forming him from the dust of the ground — “Adama” in Hebrew — and God breathed the breath of life into his

¹ Genesis 1:20-25

² Genesis 1:26-27

nostrils; and the man became a living being. And God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden — that is, “The Garden of Delight”³ — to till and keep it.⁴

Soon it was clear that Adam needed a partner in this endeavor, so God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and, removing one of Adam’s ribs, God created a woman.⁵

Adam rejoiced that he was no longer alone, that he had a partner in Creation, and he sang out a word of praise:

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.”⁶

The man and the woman were deeply connected: of one flesh.⁷ God likewise had partners to care for Creation, and all of Creation had stewards to till and keep it.

God saw everything that was made, and indeed, it was very good.⁸

And things stayed “very good” for a while. Adam and Eve were busy naming animals, enjoying the bounty of food around them, doing some gardening. And it was apparently warm enough that they didn’t need clothes — plus, self-consciousness and body shame weren’t a thing yet, so nakedness wasn’t a problem.

³ Genesis 2:7

⁴ Genesis 2:15

⁵ Genesis 2:18, 21-22

⁶ Genesis 2:23

⁷ Genesis 2:24

⁸ Genesis 1:31

There was just one rule: See that tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Do not eat its fruit, do not touch it, do not even look at it — or else you will die. Every other tree, every other fruit, plant, creature: go ahead and dig in. But not that tree of wisdom, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, right there in the middle of the garden.

Seems a little unfair — lead me not into temptation, Lord! But Adam and Eve agreed to the deal. At least for now.

Well, one day things took a turn when Eve was out gathering some lunch. One of those creeping things that creeps along the earth slithered up to her. This serpent was “more crafty than any other wild animal the Lord God had made”⁹ —remember though: God created all creatures; none came about without God’s doing.

In the ancient world, serpents — snakes — represented wisdom, fertility, and immortality. The humans’ naked innocence was no match for the serpent’s wisdom. The serpent had the wisdom of “the knowledge of good and evil,” and used that knowledge to persuade the humans to go against the one rule of the Garden: that forbidden tree with its delicious fruit, a delight for the eyes, and nourishing wisdom.

As soon as the man and woman ate this fruit, they gained wisdom. And with their wisdom they realized they were naked, and gained shame. When they heard the Lord God taking an evening walk through the garden, Adam and Eve hid themselves from God. When God called out to them and asked why they were hiding, Adam immediately turned on Eve and blamed her for giving him the forbidden fruit. And Eve, in turn, blamed the craftiest of all of God’s created beings that creep along the earth.

In these moments, all of the deep connections between God and human, God and Creation, human and human, human and creation are ruptured —

⁹ Genesis 3:1

each becoming disconnected. And with that disconnection came hardship, inequality, exploitation, dominance, and suffering.

When the serpent tempted and tricked Eve, it caused a disconnection between humanity and Creation. By extension, since both the serpent and the tree were God's creations, therein lies a potential disconnection between humanity and God.

When after discovering their nakedness and hiding from God, Adam and Eve caused a disconnection between humanity and God.

Perhaps most damaging to humanity's connectedness, when Adam so quickly laid blame on Eve in order to escape or mitigate whatever punishment would befall him, it resulted in disconnection between genders. Gone was Adam's rejoicing at finding a true partner; and the union of "one flesh" that had been formed was now torn.

Yet even before Adam's blaming of Eve, there was an earlier moment when he failed to be a true partner. As scripture tells the story, the woman "took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her..."

From this wording, we can assume that Adam was standing there with Eve as the serpent questioned her, tempted her, goaded her into rule breaking — and Adam made the choice to not speak up, assist, defend, intervene or otherwise support his partner. Adam was tacitly complicit in the whole deal.¹⁰

Following all of this, God reacts with what sounds like a curse or a criminal sentence: The serpent is condemned to slither on the ground and become both predator and prey to humanity; the woman and the man will face greater toil and suffering as they seek to live out the natural functions of their lives.

¹⁰ Cf. Dennis Olsen in http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=868

God then banishes the humans from the Garden — but not before God fashions garments of animal skins for them to wear. By this, we can understand that God still cares for humanity despite this transgression.

How well do we know this story? Or rather, how well do we *think* we know this story?

Centuries of interpretation and misinterpretation have added details, shifted meaning, corrupted translation and context, and even weaponized this story. The story of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden is just one part of the larger creation myth — really, *myths*, plural — common in the ancient Near East and Middle East: Origin stories crafted to explain, “Why is the world like it is? Why are things like they are?”

When we encounter scriptures such as this one with such a sense of overconfident familiarity, we are called to read and reread the stories — to really interrogate the meaning and implication, and not gloss over the passage simply because we think we already know all there is to learn.

Read the story again, and you’ll immediately find that the images we might hold and the lessons we think we might know are without scriptural evidence.

A simple thing, such as the forbidden fruit was not an apple. The exact fruit is never mentioned, and apples were unknown to the writers of Genesis.

A slightly more significant fact: the serpent was not Satan. While supernatural beings who seek to thwart God’s plans do appear in other Hebrew Bible scriptures, a personified Satan — or “Ha-Satan” — is first witnessed in the Book of Job. No such name is mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Apparently a talking serpent was only that, and not a manifestation of an adversarial supernatural being.

The Garden of Eden itself was never described as perfect: God pronounced it “good” and “very good,” but not exactly a carefree, toil-free paradise. Humanity was created to care for creation, and so there was work to do from the beginning: tilling the ground, stewardship of creation, following the rules, and — apparently — needing to be on-guard against temptations and potentially dangerous creatures.

From there, things get messier and even more significant.

While this story is often thought to describe the so-called “Fall of Man” and has given us the concept of “Original Sin,” read and reread the text, and note that you will not find the word “sin” anywhere in these passages. The word “sin” is not mentioned until later when the Lord confronts Cain about his anger, asking: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire for you, but you must master it.”¹¹

Patriarchal and outright misogynistic interpretation has laid the blame on Eve for the origin of sin. Again, read carefully, because that’s not what the story tells us. Adam was there, too — and did nothing to intervene. Eve did not trick or deceive Adam — he made his own choice.

Remember that this story was created in part to answer questions about human origin and the reasons for why things are like they are:
If God provides, why must we work so hard to cultivate food?
If God is so good and caring, why are there creatures that are out here trying to bite and kill us?
If God wants us to “be fruitful and multiply,” and have children, why is it so painful and — for some — potentially lethal?

Attributing human toil and suffering to “Original Sin” gives us a neatly packaged explanation — and a seemingly inescapable condemnation from the moment of our birth, encoded in our DNA, cursed by the actions of

¹¹ Genesis 4:6-7

ancient and mythical ancestors — a curse so enduring that it can only be lifted and reconciled millennia later by the blood sacrifice of God's-self made flesh in the person of Jesus.

But there is another way to read this story that still gives us insight to the cause of our suffering. Rather than a curse or condemnation, we can read this story as a lament.

The mythical Garden of Eden was not perfect, but it was very good, and it was deeply connected. The transgression that happened there was disconnection between God and humanity, humanity to humanity, and humanity to Creation. The loss of true interdependence and trust, the move from equal partnership to dominance and patriarchy, the change from stewardship of creation to exploitation of resources: all of these ruptured that divinely ordained connection; and that disconnection was accounted as sin.

The concept of sin is indeed a fraught and sensitive topic. For years I refused to consider the idea that I, myself, could sin and did sin and was in need of repentance. I would recoil at Prayers of Confession and Assurances of Pardon. This was not because I thought of myself as perfect and blameless — far from it. I believe this is mainly because I was never really taught what sin meant.

I had only heard the word “sin” used to persecute and demonize people. And I'm willing to bet that some of us here have been defamed as sinners for who we love, who we are in this world, who or what we appear to be in the judgmental eyes of others — forgetting who we are and whose we are in the eyes of God.

But to learn that sin is separation, that sin is an action or a thought that drives a wedge or breaks a connection — ah ha! Then certainly yes! Yes, I sin. I sin daily. And in the spirit of Martin Luther, I sin boldly!

When I do something that forces a wedge and ruptures the connection between God and me, I have sinned. When I do something to make others

feel unequal, I have sinned. When I do damage to the earth and all of Creation, I have sinned. When I turn away from the poor and those in need, when I choose apathy over action, when I respond out of frustration or impatience or anger or fear instead of love and grace — I have sinned.

I have sinned by damaging that divinely created and divinely desired connection between humanity and God, humanity and humanity, and humanity and Creation.

But here's the Good News: our sin does not define us, and it is not terminal. Sin does not have the final word. Disconnection is not our final state of being with God, each other, or Creation.

Remember the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, proclaiming that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹²

And hear this again: Separation, disconnection, sin is not the final word. The wilderness journey of Lent reminds us of that.

No, separation, disconnection, sin is not the final word for us.

Connection is the final word. Hope is the final word. Love is the final word.

Liberation is the final word. Resurrection is the final word.

And that — my sisters, brothers, and siblings — is Good News.

Amen.

¹² Romans 8:38-39