

**June 11, 2023 Second Sunday after Pentecost**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Genesis 2:4-9, 3:1-5**

**"Creation: How We Get Bruised"**

**Douglas T. King**

Today we continue our romp through the creation stories in the Bible. Last week we heard the story of the first chapter of Genesis, why it was written for the Jewish people in exile in Babylon, and how it speaks to us in our own moments of exile. Today we heard a portion of the second creation narrative that is presented in Genesis.

Time precludes us from reading all of the narrative but we know where the story goes. We know Eve and Adam will both eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And we know that they will hide from God and thus be banished from the Garden of Eden.

It is a story that has captured both theologians and popular culture for thousands of years. And it is a story that has been mangled in all sorts of ways to make theological pronouncements and judgments that were never originally intended.

Like last week's text from the first chapter of Genesis, it is helpful to understand the context in which this was written. It is believed to have been written during the years of the monarchy in Israel. The Biblical Scholar Walter Brueggemann hears this narrative as a critique of human power concentrated in the royal system. In other words, this story speaks to the reality which we often forget that ultimately it is not we who are in charge, but God who is in charge.

If we look at the arc of this story I think that makes sense. The divine takes mere dust, the most inconsequential of matter and breathes into it. Humanity is given life. On the most fundamental level the only reason we are animated, that we exist in living form at all, is God's choice to put part of Godself within us. God's very breath gives us breath. Then God creates a verdant garden around us, with everything we need to not only sustain ourselves but to delight in all that surrounds us.

In the midst of this cornucopia of blessings a single boundary is drawn. Everything is gifted to us with one exception. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is off limits. But the serpent knows just what to say to make the fruit from that tree irresistible. It takes one single phrase, "you will be like God..." What a thoroughly enticing thought.

The interplay between having God's very breath blown into us, animating us, giving us life, and the temptation, for which we all fall in one way or another, to strive to be like God, creates our perpetual predicament. This story of Adam and Eve and the serpent and God was never intended to be a history lesson of any actual moment in time. It was never intended to be an indictment of one gender over the other. It was never intended to create shame around issues of sexuality. It was never intended to describe some original sin which is passed down genetically from one generation to the next. It was designed to paint a picture of our particular predicament. We are given so very much by God, life and a remarkable creation, and, well everything. But we want the one thing we cannot ever have, to be God.

You can understand how this might speak to a people living under the rule of a king. The concentration of human power helps to shape the illusion that somehow we are capable of being autonomous; that we are capable of mastering the outcomes of this world; that we do not need God to sustain us.

We all have these moments when we feel like we are in complete control. They often come when we are riding high. A successful business deal brings a wonderful change to our standard of living. A promotion puts us in a place where we find ourselves near the top of the food chain where many people report to us and are prepared to do what we ask. We go through a period of prosperity in our personal lives where our relationships with our partner, our children, and our friends are all in tune. Our health is good. The horizon is nothing but rosy. Perhaps at first we feel nothing but gratitude for all that is good in our lives. Surely we have been blessed.

But then there is this shift in orientation. It feels for all the world that we are the masters of our own fate. Certainly we have earned all of these good things. After all we are smart and we have worked hard and have tried to be a good person. In fact not only do we very much deserve all of these wonderful things but we are entitled to what we have and more.

We may not think of ourselves as God-like but we lose sight of the reality that our very existence has been gifted to us by our creator. And what's more, we lose sight of the reality that everything we have accomplished would have been impossible without the talents God has freely given to us. Thus, our worldview becomes skewed.

Living as the central character in the land of entitlement has a glorious beginning. We feel empowered and pleased with

ourselves and believe there are no limits as to what we can do. =But it does not end well. When those around us do not bend to our every whim we feel frustrated and cheated. When we fail, we believe it is the world that has failed us, not any fault of our own. And when we find ourselves in need of God, the journey to get there seems long and complicated. We have been wearing the God-hat ourselves for so long we have lost touch with the real and living God. We have walked ourselves out of the garden of generosity. And then we find ourselves feeling bruised by life and wondering how the heck we got to this place and who is to blame for it.

Well, this creation story illuminates our condition. Whatever coaxing and encouragement we may receive, it is we who cannot resist the temptation to seek to be like God. We cannot resist tasting the fruit of what we hope will be divine autonomy. It is not exactly a genetic disorder that is passed on like some original sin but it appears we all take a bite of this fruit at some point in our lives. And for most of us we go back to the tree on a regular basis. In doing so we find ourselves banished from recognizing all that we have been given.

So where is the good news? Well, you cannot start getting yourself out of a predicament until you comprehend what the predicament is. Now, to be fair, if the history of all humanity has taught us anything it is that we will never truly escape this predicament, at least while we are making our way in this world.

But there is a way forward. Every time we feel as if life owes us a lot more than we have, remember that the garden we have been born into is all a gift. In fact each and every breath we take is blown into us by our God. Every time we grow

frustrated that we cannot control all of the outcomes of our life, remember that trying to be like God does not make us God. Every time we wonder why God seems so distant from us, remember that when we are so busy trying to be God we are in reality hiding ourselves from the one true God who is seeking us out. It is not God who has banished us from paradise, we have banished ourselves by refusing to receive all this offered us as a gift.

But we are always welcome to leave the land of entitlement; to journey back to the garden of generosity. Our God in Jesus Christ has recognized our predicament. And to help us get beyond our need to try to be God, has chosen to become human to bridge all that divides us. The answer to all that ails us is not our journey of entitlement to become Godlike but God's journey of self-sacrifice to become human and share completely in our predicament. When Jesus is tempted in the wilderness to demonstrate divine power, he resists. At every turn, all the way to his death, Jesus shuns the entitlement he could rightly claim in order to stand beside us and love us and invite us back.

All we need to do is recognize the gift being offered and accept who God is and who we are as the children of God. The invitation to return to the garden of generosity awaits.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Brueggemann, Walter, *Genesis*, from the Interpretation series, John Knox Press, USA, 1982.