

Choices and Consequences

Trinity Sunday – June 6, 2004

Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passage (NRSV)

Genesis 3:1-13

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?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but 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.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”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. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸They 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. ⁹But 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.”

*Today we begin a new six-week series:
Kids' Stories All Grown Up!*

“Kids' Stories All Grown Up”??

One of the best books I ever read on drawing is Betty Edward's *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. She notes that if you ask adults to draw a picture, say of a house, they'll pretty much draw the same picture they would have drawn at the age of ten! At a young age, we seem to lock into our brains a 'symbol' of a house or a train or a plane that we call up whenever we draw them as adults. Thus, part of learning to draw as an adult is getting past all the symbols that we've stored away and never reconsidered.

Bible stories are much like that. When we are children, we learn and enjoy the stories of Adam and Eve or Noah or Samson. But our understanding of these stories stays with us, even as we mature and grow into adults. As adults, we have to 'unlearn' the stories and approach them fresh. That is what this six-week series is all about. We asked some of the St. Andrew children to tell us their favorite Bible stories and the results were predictable: Adam and Eve, Noah, Jonah, and the rest. For the next six weeks, we are going to look at six 'kid stories' but through the eyes of grown-ups.

The story begins

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the opening chapters of Genesis to all the rest of the Bible, including the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. N.T. Wright tells the

A Surprise in the Garden

One of the pleasures of teaching a Bible study is seeing the look on people's faces when they run into one of the Bible's many surprises. The story of Adam and Eve has one of the biggest.

When God plants a garden in Eden (in Genesis 2), he creates Adam and puts him in the garden “to till it and keep it.” Work!! In the garden of Eden?? I don't think anyone ever pointed that out to me when I was a kid.

What can we learn from this? Work is inherently good and part of God's created order. In Genesis, work becomes burdensome only *after* Adam and Eve make their bad choice. When our work is not fulfilling and joyful it is a reflection of the damage done to God's creation. Thus, a fair question is whether we are doing all we can to make our own work and the work of others as fulfilling and rewarding as we possibly can. This is yet one more concrete expression of what it means to love our neighbor.

biblical story (all of it!) as a five-act play ~ and the first two acts are completed by the end of Genesis 3! There is enough here to keep us going for weeks, but today we'll concentrate on the moment in Act 2 when Adam and Eve make their tragic choice.

Choices

God has created everything and everything is God. He has created humans in his image and given them a beautiful garden in which to live and to work. He has created them male and female so that they won't be lonely. He has done all this out of love and asks only one thing of the humans - don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God has even warned them of the dire consequences (like death!) if they decide to go their own way and eat the fruit.

We all know what happens. Eve *chooses* to listen to the serpent rather than to God. Yes, the serpent has lied to her, but this is her free choice. The serpent doesn't make her do anything and neither does God. Eve grabs what she thinks is the chance to be "like God" (v.5). But, of course, God is God, and Eve is not. So she takes the fruit home, gives some to her husband, and he eats it too.

What is Sin?

I get this question a lot in my classes and I've come to realize that sin is commonly misunderstood. We tend to think of sin only as the breaking of a rule, as if we might look back over our day and count the sins we committed. But this is not the best way to go about understanding sin.

Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is whatever diminishes the image of God in us all. Sin is whatever keeps us from functioning as God intended. Sin is our brokenness . . . and we are all broken . . . and we are often too blind to even know it.

Adam, Eve, you, and I were all created by God so that we might love God and one another. When we chase after false gods or dishonor our parents or covet our neighbor's house or commit adultery, we are separated further and further from God. Adam and Eve, giving in to their pride and desiring to be like gods themselves, chose to follow their own way rather than God's way. And the result was that God came to walk with them in the evening and Adam hid from God! *Separation.*

In the biblical view, Adam and Eve's choice is still with us. They ran from God, causing a tragic rip in the relationship between God and humanity. It is as if their bad choice passed on to us a flaw in our moral DNA, a flaw that we cannot fully heal ourselves, but must be healed by God. Sin is what separates us from God. God is holy; thus, to grow in our own holiness is to reduce that separation. But in the end, the gap is only fully closed when we claim Jesus' holiness as our own.

She doesn't have to threaten him ~ they both make a willing choice. This is a basic biblical truth. Our choices are free . . . and we are responsible for them. We are free to choose *for* God or *against* God.

Consequences

Choices have consequences. The over-arching consequence of the humans' choice to go their own way is their immediate separation from God. Eating the fruit is sinful, in that it separates them from God (see the text box). The story of this separation is one of the most poignant in all scripture.

God comes to walk in the garden with his people. There is a cool evening breeze. This is a picture of a relationship with God that you and I can hardly imagine. When Moses encounters God, he has to turn away from even seeing God's face, lest he be killed. But not Adam and Eve; God has come to take a stroll with them. But they have chosen against God and now their choice hits home. They hide from God! Cowering behind a tree, they hear God calling for them and, surely reluctantly, they answer. When God asks Eve and Adam how it is that they chose to eat the fruit, they both start looking for someone to blame. Eve points the finger at the serpent. Adam blames his wife. It is tragic and pathetic . . . and so very human, so like us all.

Their choice has not only ripped apart their own relationship with God, it has damaged all creation (Romans 8:22). They must leave the garden. Work will be burdensome. Childbirth will be painful. One of their sons will murder the other. The world will be beset by illness, hatred, pride, envy, and even death.

All the rest of the Bible tells the story of God's working toward the restoration of his relationship with his people and the renewal of his creation. God's work will be pressed forward through God's people, not despite them; first, through Israel and then climactically through Jesus, as God rescues *us* from our plight.

Daily Bible Readings

(Creation, Choices, Consequences, and Christ)

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Day 1 Genesis 1:1-2:4a The first story of creation	Day 2 Genesis 2:4b-2:25 The second story of creation
Day 3 Genesis 3:1-20 The tragic choice is made and sin enters the picture	Day 4 Genesis 3:22-4:16 Adam and Eve leave the garden; Cain murders Abel
Day 5 Romans 5:12-21 Paul on Adam and Christ	Weekly Prayer Concerns

Sermon Notes

Next Sunday is *SECOND SUNDAY*! 9am in Wesley Hall. Join us!!

Each second Sunday of the month throughout the year, you are invited to a time of praise and celebration in Wesley Hall at 9:00. Led by the wonderful music of Step-by-Step and hosted by the adult Sunday Schools, this is an exhilarating way to begin your Sabbath. We'll be done by 9:25 – in plenty of time for you to attend 9:30 worship and Sunday School.

St. Andrew Bible Academy audio courses are now in-stock in the bookstore.

Note – The first “Fruit of the Spirit” evening lecture will be June 15th at 7pm in Piro Hall with Rev. Kathryn Self – *not* June 8th as printed in the newsletter.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Sin. Not something we talk about very much. Why is that? Does it make us uncomfortable? Does it make us feel guilty? Perhaps we feel that talking about sin only reinforces the prevalent notion that God is The Great Rule-maker, always devising ingenious ways to catch us doing something wrong. If we see God as this rule-maker, we will naturally see something like the Ten Commandments as a list of rules that we are to keep. But this is not how to understand the Ten Commandments.

Adam and Eve forgot that they were creatures, not gods; that they were dependent upon God, not independent of God. Like them, we are created to be in loving relationship with God and one another. The Ten Commandments articulate what it means to be in loving relationship. We are not in loving relationship with our neighbors when we covet their stuff, or with our parents when we dishonor them, or with our spouses when we commit adultery. We are in loving relationship when we pursue justice and mercy, when we clothe the naked and feed the hungry. From the Ten Commandments to the Sermon on the Mount, the Bible is filled with God’s teachings about what it really means to live so as to reflect the image of God within us.

Sin, then, is far more than rule-breaking. It is a distortion of our relationship with God and others and it has dire consequences, so dire that in the end God himself must put things right.

How would seeing sin as the distortion of relationship and seeing God’s Law as teachings about relationship change your reading of the Bible? Knowing that the Holy Spirit helps us to overcome sin and separation, what are some concrete steps we could to diminish the grip of sin in our lives?