

“This is our Story; This is our Song”

OT: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

NT: Matthew 4:1-11

Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-7:

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ 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?’” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ 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.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵ for 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. ⁷ 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:

⁴ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ 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.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

1. I love stories, don't you? I love hearing them. I love telling them. I used to sit on the porch with my grandparents, and they would tell stories about their childhood, working tobacco, the great depression and life since then. I could listen for hours. But beyond details, what does a story require?

A story has five basic but important elements:

1. the characters (here in Genesis 2 & 3, we have God, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent),
2. the setting (creation in this case, specifically the garden),
3. the plot (this story is one of miscommunication, temptation, disobedience, and eviction),
4. the conflict (who is God and what choice/what role/what power do humans have?)
5. and the resolution (humankind is evicted for now, but wait, redemption is on the way).

What kinds of story do we know of? “According to the experts, 99% of all stories ever told can be categorized at their most basic level into one of seven plots:

1. The underdog, 2. The quest, 3. Voyage and return 4. Rags to riches, 5. Comedy, 6. Tragedy, and 7. Rebirth.”¹

Our lives reflect those different kinds of story, when we experience the gamut of human emotions and experience, when we live through the ups and downs, the twists and turns.

2. This story, often called the fall, is a story of human purpose. It helps us understand our purpose. Theologian Jon Berquist writes about that purpose.

- God created the garden, then put humankind in it to till it and keep it.
- Human purpose forms the backdrop for the rest of what happens in the garden.
- God made it in six days, he spoke, and it came into being.
- Then he rested, he enjoyed the story so far, but there was more to be written.
- Other ancient stories speak of humans as a by-product, accident, or even a mistake of the gods.
- In Genesis, God writes a different story. Genesis makes it clear that God *intended* to create people.
- We are designed and fashioned with something in God's mind for us to do.
- We have a God given purpose. We were not created for ourselves. We were created in order to till and keep the garden.
- But till and keep is not, Jon Berquist says, the best translation. Those who serve in our police force will cherish what Jon does here. He argues a better translation is to “*Protect and serve*”. To protect creation and each other, to serve. Being a servant of earth moves us to a different place in the story. This is where the plot thickens. Here is this fruit that looks good to eat, yet our purpose is to serve others, not ourselves. What are we to do? (PAUSE)

Living as servants of creation fulfills God's intention for us. It helps us live up to the reasons we were created in the first place. This is no pastime, nor is it a strategy for us to feel good about ourselves. We are God's instruments. God has outlined the story, and we must play our part.

- However, while the story may be compelling, we do share a proclivity to get distracted. In our work and lives, “we will get distracted by fruit, and we will think they look good to eat.

- We will meet interesting animals and strike up interesting conversations with them to pass the time of day, we will rationalize what we are doing when we aren't in line with God's work, we will settle for doing as others tell us, when we need to concentrate on God's mission before us.” (J. Berquist)

- As an example, I would like to share a story from Guideposts, Mr. Gordon writes “As I ran on the beach the other day, I noticed that certain areas were closed off by fences and signs that said “Sea Turtle Eggs.”

I remembered reading that female sea turtles swim to shore between May and August to dig nests in the sand and lay their eggs. Months later, the eggs hatch and the baby turtles *follow the pure light of the moon back to the surf.*

In a perfect world, *the pure light of the moon* guides every turtle back safely to the ocean. However, we don't live in a perfect world.

¹ www.storybistro.com

Sea Turtle hatchlings instinctively crawl toward the brightest light. On an undeveloped beach, the brightest light is the moon. On a developed beach, the brightest light can be an artificial light source emanating from restaurants, homes and condominiums along the coast. Unfortunately, these artificial sources of light often attract the hatchlings and cause them to move in the wrong direction when they are born. Rather than *follow the pure light of the moon* to the ocean, the sea turtles follow the wrong light to a disastrous outcome. (He says) It occurred to me that we humans face a similar challenge. Rather than follow the path we were meant to follow, we too often are distracted by things that move us in the wrong direction. Technology, online games, too much time on Facebook, bad habits, addictions, stress, busyness and meaningless distractions lead us astray. Instead of following *the pure light* of perfection, we allow bright and shiny artificial things to sabotage our journey.²

3. When faced with distraction or temptation, we have a choice.

This reminds me of those choose your own adventure books, do you remember them or perhaps you read one back in the day? For those who have not. The books are written in the second person. The protagonist—that is, the reader—takes on a role relevant to the adventure. After a few pages of the story, the reader is faced with an option relevant to the plot at that point. They can choose option A, turn to a certain page and follow that subsequent story line. Or choose option B and the book sends you to a different page on a different storyline. In our case, God sets the stage, creates the world with options aplenty, and we have choices.

Scripture is replete with examples of these choices... all woven into the story of the good book.

- Adam and Eve made choices in the Garden. I wonder how things would be if they had obeyed...
- Moses made choices in Egypt, and in the wilderness, as did the people of Israel.
- Joshua gathered the tribes of Israel in the promised land, saying to them **“revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve.”**
- Jesus made choices in the wilderness when tempted by Satan.
 - **If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.** He chose not to.
 - **If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down;** He chose not to.
 - **All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.** Jesus chose not to.
 - Granted, Jesus is God and we are not, but the point remains. He had to know the temptation of sin, otherwise he would not have been able to effect salvation for us.
- But there are consequences of choices, as well, correct?
- Adam and Eve faced the results of their choice. Though they didn't die, they were evicted from the garden; more distant from God, and perhaps that was worse.
- Once you choose one thing, you forsake another.
- Scripture says, **“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.**
- **But those who choose another god, (little g), multiply their sorrows.**
- **Who are they that fear the LORD? He will teach them the way that they should choose.”**

4. What is the part, or what shall we say about, responsibility?

- “The divine "scheme of things," as Christianity understands it, is at once extremely elastic and extremely rigid. It is elastic, in that it includes a large measure of liberty for the creature; it is rigid in that it includes the proviso that, however created beings choose to behave, they must accept responsibility of their own actions and endure the consequences.”³
- Throughout the scriptures, we read the human story interacting with the divine plan.
- Genesis gave us the setting and characters. Later, the characters change, but the Lord remains.
- the plot twists and turns as each new chapter unfolds.
- the conflict continues, as each successive generation attempts to exert its own control over the story, to write its own narrative.
- and the resolution, though evicted from the garden, we have the promise of redemption, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, the promise that God will never leave us nor forsake us. There is temptation for Christ just as there was temptation for Adam and Eve. Though he faced sin and was human in every way as we are, he who knew sin, did not sin, **who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,**
- Jesus chose to “Protect and Serve”.
- Jesus **humbled himself and became obedient unto death- even death on a cross!**
- Adam and Eve, though faced with death, chose some flashy fruit, yet were spared, they lived by God's mercy.
- Christ, faced with death, chose the cross, and bestowed grace and mercy upon us.

5. How do we write our story, during Lent, and beyond?

Maybe a better way to say that is what choices do we make within the divine storyline?

How do we keep Lent not only through Easter, but keep Lent through the year, where Lent becomes life?

Consider our story both as individuals and as a group, known as the church, called out of the world, to go and serve the world.

Consider our choices, consider the consequences, and consider our responsibility.

To frame this correctly, let us not look to our own needs, but to the needs of others, **in humility considering others more important than ourselves.**

Karen Dinesen once said that to be a person is to have a story to tell. I couldn't agree more, but who's story?

Are we bragging about our own, or sharing what God is doing?

This is our story, this is our song. It is still being written for we who are gathered here.

Blessed assurance (indeed), Jesus is mine, (and yours, and ours).

O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

With this assurance, we can confidently choose our own adventures in this thing called life.

With this assurance, we can choose to serve the Lord,

With this assurance, we can choose to protect and serve others,

With this blessed assurance, we can choose to follow God, during Lent and beyond.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

² <https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/emotional-and-mental-health/distractions-that-lead-us-in-the-wrong>

³Dorothy L. Sayer, Dorothy L. Sayer: A Rage for Life.