

**How Did We Get Here?  
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7  
February 26, 2023 – Lent 1A  
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The opening two chapters of Genesis describe what one would imagine paradise, or a utopia would be like. Creation is ordered, perfectly balanced, and interconnected. In Genesis two we see God anticipate and respond to all of Adam's needs. Giving Adam a purpose for existence, helpers, all the food they could eat and even a help mate, the perfect companion. All animals are friendly and there is no hardship in life. Adam and Eve are equal co-partners and are so interconnected to creation that they are even formed out of the earth and given the breath of God to live. God even communes with humankind. Life is perfect and all is good.

Many of us see this Genesis story as a case study in free will. Many scholars agree that to have true free will you must have options or choices about your life. This choice is like an extreme version of the Price is Right. Will Adam and Eve choose to keep the dream vacation of an all-inclusive life in paradise or take a chance on whatever is behind door number three.

In the middle of this paradise is the tree of knowledge of good and evil and God tells Adam "Do not eat from this tree for on that day you will die." So on one level this simple choice is to choose to avoid the tree or to try the tree and see what happens. But the real choice is whether or not to obey this command and trust God. Do you trust that God has provided everything and has not withheld anything that you need. Or do you second guess God, wonder if God is lying or withholding something.

This is where our journey begins, a simple choice. When we talk about original sin, it is not a place or a time but a mindset that brings sin into the world. For the writers of this story in Genesis, setting it in the beginning is to underscore the realization that this is a foundational condition that humanity has always struggled with and will always face. In an article by Carol Myers in The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women, Eve represents an archetype for all of humanity to show three primary ways that sin happens in life.

The first is how Eve adds prohibitions onto what God has commanded. When questioned by the Crafty one, Eve states God's prohibition, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden", but then adds "nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." She becomes fixated on not even touching the tree lest she die that the real prohibition is basically forgotten. We do this still today. We create additional restrictions that are arbitrary and unnecessary to avoid what we think is the real danger, which overshadows the real trespass. For example the prohibition of alcohol became law because people saw the impact that alcoholism was having on people and families. This was really a symptom of a much larger issue which was in part the exploitation of workers and the economic struggles of the family and so much more. By fixating on stopping drinking, society ignored the real underlying problems and vilified drinking instead. Today we understand more of how past trauma, dysfunctional relationships and other societal ills contribute to alcoholism in society.

The crafty one exploited Eve's fear of even touching the tree to point out the enticing appearance of the very thing she was trying to avoid by fixating

on it. Kind of like telling someone not to think of an elephant. You cannot not think of the elephant now.

The second misstep to sin that happens here is the form of jealousy between humans and God. It appears when the Crafty one says, “but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, who knows good and bad.” This puts forth the desire of humanity to control their own destiny and fate and in essence to be like God. This desire to control our own fate it fails to hold in balance the interconnected relationship that we have with creation and with God. The ability to know good and evil does not guarantee our ability to make the right choices.

The third concept of sin is based on fundamental mistrust. The crafty one in the story seeds suspicion of God’s goodness and true motives because God is imposing limits or boundaries. We know that trust is a fundamental element of any healthy relationship. If we lose trust or faith in our spouse, sibling, or parent the damage may become irreversible and lead to the end of the relationship. The restoration of the relationship begins with truth telling and yet, if we read further in the narrative, we see Adam and Eve unable to confess their wrong. Rather they use accusations and blaming others for their lack of obedience and trust. So the story ends with Adam and Eve being cast out of Eden to wander the earth. A wandering that sets us on the journey to the cross as God works to restore the trust and relationship with all of God’s creation.

The story in Genesis 3 is not concerned with the trivial matter of disobeying what seems like an arbitrary rule; do not eat from this tree. Rather it speaks more to the very nature of sin as a human desire to move beyond the

matter of trust in God to self-assurance and self-determination. Life has its limits and yet we as humans have a propensity to transgress those boundaries.

As we begin this Lenten Journey I have some souvenirs for each of us to have to remind us of this journey and the scriptural places we are stopping along the way. I invite you to take a small container of sand that represents the sand of time that God give us on this earth. Today's souvenir is a branch representing the tree of life and is symbolic of the choices we make that can either cut us off from God or grow and create healthy fruitful lives.

Take time today and this week to reflect on the many choices you find yourself making and the ways that these decisions maintain or transgress boundaries in your life. In what ways do we ignore the boundary for our own selfish desires and when do we honor and maintain those boundaries out of respect for others and God? We begin this journey with the reminder that we are not the creator but the created. We have a beginning and an end. We come to this altar and hear the words, "From dust you came and to dust you shall return." We take time to face our transgressions and seek God's healing and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Vanessa, upon reflection on today's scriptures and theme has written a song called Just One Bite a reflective song that considers God's reaction to our transgressions. As she sings this song I invite you come forward and receive the imposition of ashes. A simple reminder that we are created in God's image but are not created to be God. To recall the ways that humanity transgresses against God and fails to have faith in God's goodness and love. Come let us prepare our hearts for the Journey of faith to the cross.