

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
The Genesis of Our Faith: Brokenness
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June 27, 2021

Genesis 3:1-12; Philippians 2:1-11

I want to begin this morning with three stories rather randomly chosen from this week's news. They each come with a disclaimer that they are disturbing, yet they are necessary for our morning's discussion. First, a survey was conducted this week of service workers; those people who serve us at Starbucks or in grocery stores. The survey showed that 50% of all service workers had been either physically or verbally abused over the past year. And this is one of the reasons that many of these workers are not eager to return to their old jobs. Second, in Arvada, Colorado a man named Gordon Beesley, who was a resource officer at a local school, had agreed to pick up a shift with the Arvada Police department. He responded to a call about a suspicious person and was killed as soon as he exited his car. The man who killed Beesley did so simply because Beesley was a police officer. Third, a doctor here in our area was arrested by the FBI for selling hundreds of thousands of highly addictive opioids, perhaps addicting thousands and killing some. If these stories, and the hundreds of others like them, don't make us believe in the brokenness of the world, I am not sure what would. The question then becomes who is to blame?

If we are to listen to our tradition, the answer of who is to blame can be found in this morning's story. The one who is to blame is the woman; the woman, Eve, who listened to the talking snake and ate the fruit. Within Christianity, this is called the Fall, meaning that moment when Eve ate, and the perfection of creation was broken forever. What I want us to do, though, is to rethink this interpretation. I want us to rethink it for three reasons. First, Judaism never refers to this story as the Fall. The Fall is a Christian invention used to create a narrative about sin. Judaism instead saw this story as a tale about all human beings, and not just about the first couple. Second, I want us to rethink this story because Eve was not alone with the talking snake. Adam was right there beside her. And for the first and last time in history he chooses not to "man-splain" that she probably did not want to listen to the talking snake. Finally, I want us to rethink this story because it tells us that there were preexisting conditions within the first couple that made them vulnerable to the talking snake's offer. Let me repeat that, there were preconditions within the first couple that made them vulnerable to the talking snake's proposal. And these preexisting conditions did not go away but are still with us today. These conditions make us vulnerable to brokenness as well. And we can find these preexisting conditions in verse six. "And 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."

The first preexisting condition is that of dissatisfaction. Let me ask, how many of you, during Covid, stood in the cereal aisle of the grocery store scanning for your favorite cereal, and then were disappointed when you the store was out; when they didn't have what you were looking for. If you have, this is dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is the condition that causes us to fail to see the abundance around us because we are only focused on a single thing. This is what is going on when the scripture tells us that Eve saw that the tree was good for food. I say this because the writer of Genesis is clear that the garden was filled with all sorts of fruit producing trees. Those trees would have met every physical need that the first couple had. They would not have gone hungry because God was providing for them. But none of those trees would do because the man and woman were dissatisfied with what was on the Eden shelf. And the thing about dissatisfaction is that it leads us to internal brokenness. When we are dissatisfied, we are never happy. We are never content. We are always upset, angry and irritable. It is as if we have a hole inside that can never be filled. And I

would argue that it is dissatisfaction that is behind the physical and verbal attacks on service workers. People are dissatisfied with their food, or their fancy coffee drinks, and so they lash out...even when their food and coffee is being set before them. Dissatisfaction breaks humanity.

The second preexisting condition is desire. So, a second question for you this morning. Have you ever wanted something so badly that it was all you could think about, dream about, or talk about? If you have, then you know desire. Desire is at the heart of the first couple seeing the tree and saying, "It was a delight to the eyes." A literal translation of the phrase "a delight to the eyes" is simply "lust" meaning that the woman "lusted" after the tree. This is what I mean by desire, that desire is an almost uncontrollable lust for something; an unrestrained need to possess something or someone; an unrestrained need for power or position. The problem with this kind of desire is that it leads to brokenness by causing us to do whatever it takes to possess the object of that desire. We will risk anything. We will sacrifice anything. We will lie, cheat, steal, or kill to have that thing that we so desperately want. And so, we not only break ourselves, but we break others. We break communities. We break families. We break relationships. Desire leaves a trail of brokenness everywhere it goes. And I would argue that it was desire that drove that doctor to sell the opioids. He desired more wealth, more status, more power...and so he risked everything including his practice, his family and his freedom for that which he desired. Desire can break humanity.

The third and final preexisting condition is deity. The final question for this morning: Have you ever been in a situation of conversation in which you knew that you were absolutely right, and the other person was absolutely wrong, and you felt justified in looking down on that other person from your lofty heights of knowledge? If you have, then you know deity. Deity is focused on the first couple looking at the tree and thinking, "It was desired to make one wise." Wisdom in this context is not good wisdom, as in Biblical wisdom. Wisdom here is tied in with verse five where the talking snake tells Eve that the fruit of the tree will make her like the gods. Yes, the Hebrew is gods, not God with a capital G. In other words, it would make her equal to the god she knew, or in later times to the whole pantheon of gods. It would allow her to determine her own destiny. To see herself as greater than anything else in creation. And where this causes brokenness is when we catch a bad case of deity, we begin to look down on other people because we are greater than they. We can dehumanize them, oppress, and use them for our own ends. I believe was the cause of the death of Gordon Beasley. The man who shot him decided to play god because he, the shooter, knew that police officers ought to die and were lesser human beings. Deity breaks humanity.

The question then becomes, what can be done about these preexisting conditions? Is there a prophylaxis or vaccine that would prevent us from catching bad cases of dissatisfaction, desire and deity? The answer is yes, and it can be found in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. It is to be injected with the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ can defend us against deity by making us humble. We see this humility in that Jesus did not see equality with God as something to be desperately held onto but instead humbled himself. Humility reminds us that we are not gods, but creatures dependent on the one who created us. The mind of Christ helps us desire through service, by taking the form of a servant just as Jesus did. By being a servant our focus shifts from what we want or desire, to what others need. Finally, the mind of Christ helps us overcome Dissatisfaction through sacrifice, just as Christ sacrificed his life for the world. In sacrifice we no longer focus on what is missing in our lives, but on self-giving for others. The gift then of the mind of Christ is that it allows us to become healers rather than breakers of humanity. It allows us through humility, service and sacrifice to begin to heal the wounds of humanity and our wounds as well.

My challenge for this week then is this, to ask yourselves, how am I vaccinating my life with the mind of Christ so that I can help heal the world?