

Scripture Readings:

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

Matthew 4:1-11

Original Insecurity

Life does not come with one of those GPS systems that takes us to the easiest route, helps us avoid major traffic, potholes and dead-ends. No instead life is guaranteed to be marked with washed out bridges, major construction, and a lack of information to get to us our final destination. We will carry burdens that at times may break our backs. And we will have trials to endure. But like Jesus we do not walk this journey alone, we journey with God whether we recognize it or not. Like Jesus we also journey with others and part of the purpose of a community of faith is to assist one another on the journey's of our lives and souls.

As I began preparing for this Soul Journey series through lent I was actually encouraged by today's scriptures in an odd way. Encouraged because I was reminded that I am not the only one who is tempted, who get's discouraged, who has burdens to unload. I am not the only one who comes face to face with things that distract me from becoming who God would have me be. I am not the only one who faces insecurities and at times forgets that God is on my side.

You see the story of the tree of good and evil in Genesis tells us that from the beginning of time people have turned their focus away from God.

And so before we even begin this journey of faith let's see if we can let go of some false assumptions about what sin is and how it came about in the first place.

Dennis Olson wrote

“The popular conception of the garden of Eden story often includes elements of the following assumptions:

- * God created an absolutely perfect and static world
- * humans lived in a luxurious paradise with no responsibilities
- * the serpent is a Satan figure who brings evil into God's perfect creation
- *the woman succumbed to temptation and so she alone is responsible for bringing sin into the world
- * and the central aim of Genesis 3 is to explain how evil came into God's perfect creation.

However a careful reading of Genesis 2-3, should bring one to question these assumptions.

1) God creates a "good" but not a "perfect" world... In Genesis 1, God repeatedly calls creation "good." But the "deep" or "waters" which were understood as the source of evil and chaos in the world in ancient times did not disappear with God's creation. God's *ruach* ("wind, breath, spirit") swept over them and pushed the waters of chaos back behind the "dome" that formed the sky and also under the earth (Genesis 1:1-6). Evil and chaos thus continue to lurk

at the margins of creation and can come rushing back as in the story of Noah and the flood, (Genesis 7:11; 8:2)... God's process of creating is open and dynamic...the impression is that God's creating activity is a work in process from the beginning, not a ...a fully-formed, static and pristine universe.

2) In Genesis 2, the human has work and responsibility from the very beginning

3) In its original OT context, the serpent in Genesis 3 is not Satan who invades God's creation from the outside The serpent is one of God's own creatures who simply poses some questions and alternative explanations concerning God's motivations in creation for the humans to consider. ...There was something already in the human that resonated to the hermeneutics of suspicion that the serpent offered as one option for interpreting the words and actions of God.

4) Often the scene of the temptation in Eden is portrayed as the woman standing alone with the serpent, but a careful reading suggests that the man was present all along... Thus the man failed to speak up, to speak out, and to join the woman in an alliance against the serpent's attempt to appeal to the suspicions and yearnings that somehow were already within the humans' heart.

5) The central aim of Genesis 3 is to describe the mystery of sin, not to explain its origin. Sin is a mysterious force that arises from within God's "good" creation. ... And the yearnings and suspicions of the humans about God's motivations are somehow already embedded within the human heart from the very beginning...

Thus, Genesis 3 is less about "explaining" the origin of sin and more about describing the reality of what it is to be human and our mysterious human tendencies continually to rebel against God, to resist the gracious boundaries and limitations that God places around us for our own good, and to desire to be like God rather than thankful creatures of God.¹

The reality of the mystery of sin faces us directly in the gospel of Matthew. How is it that even Jesus encounters temptations? Jesus faces three temptations that ultimately at the core question Jesus' identity. Satan questions if Jesus is in fact the "Son of God." Jesus finds his identity questioned immediately after he is named by God "his beloved son" in his baptism at the culmination of his ministry. And so it is by Jesus' rejection of temptation that he claims his identity.

Jesus faces temptations. He faces the temptation to rely on his own devices rather than on God's power. He is encouraged to challenge God's faithfulness. And finally he is given the opportunity to succumb to greed when offered all power and glory if he will simply turn from God and devote himself to the tempter. In each case Jesus rejects the temptation and remains identified with whom God has called him to be. He is perfect in his humanity because he trusts in God's faithfulness even in the face of evil. Jesus conquers sin and temptation purely in a way we are capable of. This scripture is the beginning of the story of Jesus as the victor over sin and death. Unlike us Jesus is not defined by or addicted to the temptations he faces.

¹ Olson, Dennis workingpreacher.org Genesis 3 commentary

And when tempted Jesus lives into his faith identity. It is no coincidence that Jesus is in the wilderness for forty days, and the Israelites were there for forty years. Jesus replies to temptation with scriptures of the Israelites wilderness time. “In a sense, Jesus repeats the trials set before Israel as he is about to commence his public ministry. Just as Israel emerged from their wanderings chastened, purified, and ready to inherit God’s blessings and promises so also Jesus emerges from his trials confirmed in his identity and purified and strengthened for his awaiting mission.”² The difference in the two journey’s is that Jesus does not succumb to the temptations in the first place unlike the Israelites who gave in over and over.

So if the temptations of Jesus are about Satan questioning his identity and faithfulness David Lose asks “Might it be that a part of being human is being aware that we are insufficient, that we are not complete in and of ourselves, that lack is a permanent part of our condition? To be human, in other words, is to be aware that we carry inside ourselves a hole, an emptiness that we will always be restless to fill. Adam and Eve behold the fruit and conclude in a heartbeat that their hole is shaped just like that fruit. Yet after they eat, the emptiness remains. Today we might imagine that hole to be shaped just like a new car, or computer, or better house, or the perfect spouse.”³ or whatever vice we might choose to ease our pain.

Blaise Pascal described this condition of humanity as a “God-shaped hole.” Jesus demonstrates that there is no way to erase that hole except to be in full relationship with God. Augustine said “we humans are always restless until we rest in God.”

Perhaps these texts are to remind us that we are created for relationship with God and one another. “Perhaps the goal of the life of faith isn’t to escape limitation but to discover God amid our needs and learn, with Paul, that God’s grace is sufficient for us.”⁴

Being a person of faith does not do away with hardships, but it may give us courage to stand in them, and it should give us a community of faith to journey with in them. We are not flawed because we are tempted, even Jesus was tempted. But that same Jesus invites us to claim our identity as children of God, bringing us abundance and hope in the face of temptation.

Lately you may have noticed that we have been working on taking the stories of our faith out into our daily lives. The hope is that this will help us make sense of our lives in the midst of God’s world. This week the passages speak directly to our humanity, calling us to a new way of life. Sin and evil have a way of praying upon our insecurities. Making us feel that to be whole, fully human and aligned with God is impossible. That’s what ‘satan’ does in the garden when he suggests “God has not told you everything.” By naming their incompleteness the serpent draws

² Lose, David workingpreacher.org matthew 11 commentary

³ Lose, David IBID

⁴ IBID

attention to their wants and lacks. Lose suggests that perhaps instead of ‘original sin’ we should call it ‘original insecurity.’

As we take this ‘soul journey’ together ask yourself what is it that you are searching for? What presents itself as a God shaped hole in your life? What things are you tempted to focus on that direct you towards insecurity and loss of identity in Christ?

We live in a world of such strong insecurity that advertising has grabbed hold of it. We are so starved for a sense of meaning and purpose that we make purchases hoping they will change our lives - make us friends, make us more competent, less incomplete and more whole. But "In the end it's just a laptop or a pair of running shoes. They may be great, but they're not actually going to fill those needs."⁵

“Which brings us back to the gospel reading. One way to read it is to imagine that Jesus shows us the key to resisting temptation by finding our identity in our relationship with God...As we remember that in Baptism God confers upon us our essential identity as beloved children, we may be less likely to succumb to the various pressures that seek to tempt us.”⁶ At the same time it is important to recognize that the temptation does not stop here. Jesus has moments of frustration and doubt - we see this most particularly at Gethsemane and on the cross. Becoming a Christian will not eliminate doubts or needs or a sense of incompleteness but it will orient our lives towards our identity in God and Christ. Perhaps what our faith does is it gives us the opportunities to take our temptations, our insecurities, and our doubts to God. And then it equips us with ways to live into our identity.

At the end of today’s worship service you will be given a “Soul Journey” brochure. This gives you the opportunity for a weekly spiritual practice that I would encourage you to do as individuals, family and congregation. I have also begun a daily practice blog on our website that I invite you to join me on. I encourage you to go back and read it starting with Ash Wednesday.

This week however our practice is an ancient practice of Ignation Examen. The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience. Ignatious expected that God would speak through our deepest feelings and yearnings, what he called ‘consolation’ and desolation.’ For us consolation is whatever helps us connect with ourselves, others, God and creation. Desolation is whatever disconnects us.

I am going to invite you into a time of silent prayer now for consolation - ask yourself what draws you close to God?

⁵ IBID

⁶ IBID

For what are you grateful?
What gives you life?

I will ring the prayer bowl at the end of this time and then I will invite you into the next stage of the prayer.

Now I invite you into a time of reflection on desolation. Ask yourself
What pulls you away from God?
For what are you least grateful?
What drains life from you?

When you come to a time that you feel you are ready I invite you to pray for your awareness of God's presence in the midst of your consolations. If you feel ready take the rock that you have been given and add it to our unburdening pile. Bring your consolation to God and invite the Holy to work in the midst of your despairs, sins, temptations and consolations.

When doing this at home this week I would encourage you to take a longer time with it - but knowing this service would be long we could not take as much time with it today as I would have liked. I would also encourage you to share this practice of prayer with a partner, family member or friend - I have found this practice very rich especially when I have shared it.