

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today in our lessons we hear the tale of two different places;

The garden and the desert.

We hear the stories of two individual battles with temptation.

Adam and Eve give in to temptation

and Jesus does not.

If we're not careful we might take away the wrong message.

The wrong message is this;

To resist temptation one needs to be God.

More on the right message later.

One of the advantages of clumping multiple readings together on Sunday mornings

is that it allows us to hear more of the Bible in any given year.

One of the risks of clumping multiple readings together

is we tend to treat them like they are all one reading, one story.

This is not helped by preachers trying to tie all the lessons together in a sermon.

What we really have here are two very different stories.

They are related only because they both talk about temptation.

The first tells us a little about who we are.

The second tells us a little about who Jesus is.

As we enter the season of Lent,

these are the stories selected to start us down the road

to Jerusalem, the cross, and the resurrection.

They are both cautionary tales of the road ahead,

and historical tales of the road behind.

Today I want to spend some time with the first story,

the one from Genesis,

commonly known as the story of the fall.

We have heard it so many times that we probably don't really need to hear it again.

I mean, we all know it by heart don't we?

Actually, no, we probably do not!

Sure, we know a version of this story,

but it is a version colored by years and years of partial telling.

There are a lot of things about this story that get missed;

That have been covered up by time,

if not actually bent by theologians to their needs.

It really is a good story.

Listen carefully.

Pay attention only to the story in the Bible,

and not to the story you think you know.

Today we only heard part of the first part;

the crime section of this great saga of crime and punishment,

or more correctly sin and forgiveness.

Sadly, our story today ends at the halfway point,

with Adam and Eve standing in the midst of a beautiful and wonderful garden

in their silly little fig leaf loincloths.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Let's go back to the beginning.

The story we hear this morning,

comes from the second creation story that begins in Genesis chapter 2, verse 4,

and continues through what we heard this morning

and on to the end of chapter 3.

This really is a cracking good story

and I encourage you all to read the whole thing when you get home today.

There are some important tidbits to be found in the story

that come before we get to the part we heard this morning,

and so I want to take a moment to speak about them.

The second creation story begins,

“In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens...”

Notice that it was God making “earth and heaven,”

instead of God making “heaven and earth,”

like it is in chapter 1 of Genesis, the first creation story.

Why do you think the writer would flip it around like that?

Earth and heaven instead of heaven and earth?

Maybe to give us a clue

that we’re no longer talking about a heavenly perspective,

we are talking about an earthly perspective.

In other words, this story’s gonna be about us.

Notice also that the second creation story starts out in a desert -

no plants and no rain, and no one to till the earth.

But there is a river,

and so God takes some dust and forms a man and breathes life into him.

We pick up the story this morning as God plants a wonderful garden in Eden

and places the man in that garden, and he gives the man the rules.

So far pretty straightforward.

For some reason the lectionary folks

have decided to excise the creation of Eve from our story this morning.

Perhaps they thought that the abundance and generosity of God

was already reflected enough by the creation of all plant life

and that the story of the further creation of all animal life,

and eventually Eve would just be redundant?

I hope not.

It is an important part of the story that really should be there,

so let me give you the gist of it.

God decides that it isn’t good for man to be alone,

and that the man needs a fit helper and partner.

So God starts making animals and bringing them to the man,
but none of them work out.

Eventually, God decides that a fit helper and partner will have to be part of the man,
and so God takes a piece of the man
and creates a whole new person.

Upon first laying eyes on Eve,

Adam cries out in joy,

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.”

The story goes on to explain

that this is the reason why the attraction between the sexes is so strong.

There is one more important part of the story I need to point out before we continue.

In the original description of Eden

there are two special trees in the midst of the Garden;

The Tree of Life

and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Notice that the injunction is only against eating the fruit

of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The fruit of the Tree of Life is available to them,

that is until the knowledge of good and evil turns life from blessing to curse.

Remember that this story begins in the time before the fall when humanity is perfect.

We know this because Adam and Eve are both naked and not ashamed.

Enter the snake.

The plot thickens!

We always think that the snake is the devil,

but that isn't really in the story anywhere.

The snake is only אַרְוִם (‘ârûm) translated as cunning, prudent, subtle, or crafty.

‘ârûm in the same way that Jacob was ‘ârûm

in tricking Isaac's blessing from his brother Esau.

The conversation between Eve and the snake is very interesting on two counts.

First of all, Eve talks and Adam doesn't.

Adam is there the whole time, he just doesn't talk.

Why do you think that is?

In most of the other stories in the Bible

the only time the women folk talk is when no men folk are around.

What is so special about this time that women talk and men are silent?

I can't give you an answer, I don't know,

but it is something to wonder about.

And second, did you notice how Eve changes the injunction

against the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Not much; just a little.

"..you shall not eat...nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."

Who said anything about no touchy?

Now, to be fair, that could have been the way Adam told Eve,

since Eve wasn't around when Adam got the original instructions,

but either way Adam agrees by his silence.

He doesn't correct her.

Adam and Eve are partners.

They're in it together.

Already they are stepping over the line,

putting words in God's mouth,

usurping God's power.

The snake's work is done almost before that forked tongue starts wagging.

So if this story is about us, as I said at the beginning,

what does it say about us?

What does it reveal?

Why is it important to hear now?

Lent is for us a time of preparation,

a time when we look honestly at ourselves and our behavior;

When we measure ourselves against the image God has of us.

It can be a time of profound sadness

as we see the wide gap between who we are

and who God has called us to be.

It is a time when we again take a bite from that forbidden fruit

of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

and again have our eyes opened.

For Adam and Eve,

the story ends with them hiding from God in silly costumes of prickly leaves.

The fruits of their behavior have already ripened,

but they are as yet unaware.

It is left to God to reveal the results of their actions.

It is different for us.

Though the archangel Uriel stands at the gate of the garden,

flaming sword in hand barring us from the Tree of Life,

we have no need to pass.

For we have our own Tree of Life, the Cross of Christ.

In Lent we are counseled to take on various forms of discipline,

or sacrifice some luxury, in an effort to correct our relationship with God.

And so we try,

but it's tough and we don't do as well as we would have liked

and then we make excuses

and it all amounts to sewing a bunch of prickly leaves together

to cover our nakedness.

Again.

We must look pretty silly to God at times.

Thank goodness God loves us!

You see, what God really wants from us is relationship, not behavior;
real relationship.

In the coming days of Lent spend some quality time with God.

Give something up, not to do penance, but to make space for God.

Do the best you can and don't make excuses.

Don't expect to get it right the first time.

Expect to make mistakes.

Don't worry, God loves you.

God understands.

And if you find yourself hungry,

for God's sake,

and for yours,

come to the table.

Amen.