

Genesis 2:25-3: 1-24
June 26, 2011
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

“And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” (Gen. 2:25)

This comment, uttered almost as an afterthought, is crucial to understanding everything else that happens in yet another of the great misinterpreted text of the Bible. In a frozen moment of time we see Adam and Eve in the garden in the grand harmony of God’s creation. The writer has chosen his words with care. We are meant to see the completed creation. Every creation is in its rightful place. We are not allowed to intrude our knowledge about the tragic events which follow. They are as yet unknown to the woman and the man. This is the state of what is rightly called “original innocence.” It is the lovely morning of life when all is well. In God’s sight, all is “very good.” God has imparted God’s yearning of love. All creation is imbued with this love. It is part and parcel of the tiniest bit of energy.

Thus when the writer states that the man and the woman “were both naked and unashamed” he means more than that they were what the French philosopher, Rousseau, called, “noble savages.” We are given a picture of profound and uncomplicated intimacy: intimacy between the man and the woman, he two human beings and the rest of creation, and most importantly, between the man, the woman and God.

There are two words which bring home this state of original innocence: “naked” and “unashamed.” It is the legacy of the events which follow this verse that it is impossible for most of us to imagine the two words being used together. To be found naked is for most of us to experience embarrassment and shame. Like many of you I have recurring dreams of being naked in embarrassing situations. Friday night after returning from the Old Songs Festival I had a

dream which included my sitting in a church pew with no clothes. Such is the regularity of being naked in dreams that my reaction to this discovery was to sigh and say to myself—in the dream—“why does this always happen to me?” I propose that nakedness and our reaction to being naked has more significance than simply being in a state of undress. To be naked is to be exposed in our innermost being. It is difficult if not impossible for me to imagine being completely exposed as a human being without feeling acute embarrassment. No, it’s worse than that. The idea of being completely “naked” is terrifying. It generates profound fears of being humiliated and abandoned. My primal desire is to find a place to hide and so regain a sense of security—of being safe.

The casualty of this condition is that we are deeply afraid of the one thing that can give us true peace—intimacy. True intimacy is impossible without a complete revealing. Without this intimacy there can be no real depth of relationship. Profound and secure relationships between people and God rely on trust. Trust indicates a willingness to be revealed as who I really am. Trust is a belief that you won’t abandon me or betray me. Intimate trust goes two ways. It is not about keeping terrible secrets. It is the opening of one person to another and revealing our true and fragile selves—in short becoming “naked” to each other. To be able to do this in mutual trust is the only way I know to become free of the power of guilt and shame. In the end, it is only this ability to be naked in the presence of God which washes us clean and gives us freedom of soul.

This morning I will not lead you through the events recounted in this profoundly true story. Focusing on why God put a forbidden tree in the garden—what lawyers would call an “attractive nuisance;” assessing blame for disobeying God; identifying the snake as Satan—all of this analysis, in my humble opinion gets us nowhere and has caused a lot of pain and oppression. Instead, I want to offer to you the *effects* of the deed.

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. *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. (3: 6-7)

Then what happens?

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. (3:8)

The immediate result of eating the fruit is the impulse to cover nakedness and to hide from God. In the first act they hide from each other. In the second act they seek to become invisible to the One with whom they had previously had complete trust.

Friends, whatever else you might want to call this-- the Original Sin, Human Disobedience—it is a tragedy. It is a tragedy that continues to impair our lives to this very day, indeed, to this very moment. We are witness to a simultaneous breaking of the intimate ties that have sustained intimate and whole relationships among human beings and with God. The tragedy extends to creation itself as we find in verses 14-19. A state of harmony and cooperation between humans and nature is transformed. It is now adversarial, hostile and a source of sweat and pain.

Is this not a true and accurate description of life? Is not the history of humanity written here? Is this universally true? I don't know. There are attempts to portray some indigenous cultures as untainted by this shattering of original innocence. My limited study leads me to be doubtful about this. The contrast between Western civilization and native cultures is more a matter of degree than the contrast of utter corruption and innocence. Certainly our lack of respect for creation and other cultures holds us to account. Yet the older I get the more convinced I become that there are no political or social solutions to this original problem. The tragedy is a

spiritual tragedy and therefore whatever healing that is possible must be spiritual in nature. We must seek to be restored to the original intimacy with God, with one another and with creation.

But how are we to do this? I identify with the apostle Paul when he wrings his hands and cries. “The good that I want to do is not what I do. And the evil that I do not want to do is what I do.” (Romans 7:24) My image for this comes from trying to repair the slate roof on our church in Rochester. Every step we took on the roof to repair damage cracked the slate and created new damage.

The hard truth is simply this: On our own we cannot repair the broken relationships. As they are, things will not get better. It is a hard and bleak fact.

But there is good news. There is very good news. And it is news from the God who saw creation and called it very good. This going to sound like the same old proclamation you have been hearing for years. I cannot help it. The fact that something is eternally true and there is no snappy new way of saying it does not change the fact that the proclamation *is in fact true!*

We cannot change or reverse the effects of the tragedy. But God in and through his son, Jesus Christ has declared restoration! This morning I ask you to gaze upon the cross. I ask you to call to mind and heart all the fear and anger and guilt and shame that came together to call for Jesus’ death. God’s son allowed this to happen! God allowed the son to endure the tragedy of execution when he had done no wrong. I ask you to consider that on Easter Sunday when God really did raise Jesus from the dead all the consequences of the original tragedy were resolved—from God’s point of view. As we sing in the hymn, “The strife is o’er, the battle won, the victory of life is won!”

We cannot restore the broken relationships. But God can. God *has!* Our one task is to believe this good news and ask God, but her Holy Spirit to give us the grace to accept that we *are* restored and to live as people who are restored.

This is no easy task. It is a life long journey. It is a journey of witness and practice. We witness not by being a people who believe God has restored the world in Jesus Christ and who seek to manifest that restoration so that people may discover a life that that they never thought possible. This we do as individuals. But more importantly we do it together—in community, for we are much stronger in our witness together.

To borrow the slogan from the sixties: today is the first day of the rest of your life restored to full relationship with god, with one another and with creation. Decide today to make it your intention to live the restored life by the grace of a loving God. Amen.