

God Tells Adam and Eve to Go
Gen. 3
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Did you have a favorite cartoon as a kid? I loved “Scooby Doo.” Every Saturday morning I’d fix a bowl of cereal – Fruit Loops or Cap’n Crunch - and sit in front of the TV waiting for it to come on. I loved Scooby and Shaggy’s silliness, I loved trying to solve the mysteries, and I think I had a crush on Thelma. Each episode featured some kind of scary ghost or ghoul, which always ended up being one of the “good guys” who was actually a bad guy. The ghost would be revealed at the end, and would always exclaim, “I would’ve gotten away with it if it hadn’t been for you darn kids!”

That hero-turned-villain trope is quite common in our popular culture. Walter White, the chemistry teacher turned meth dealer on “Breaking Bad.” Anakin Skywalker turning into Darth Vader. The big reveal of Kaiser Soze in “The Usual Suspects.” And one of my all-time favorites from the Batman movie “the Dark Knight,” in which hero prosecutor Harvey Dent evolves into the villain Two Face.

Even a book as venerated a sacred as the Bible isn’t immune from this plot twist, but we don’t always get those versions of the stories as kids. For our summer sermon series, Trish and I are going to take a closer look at some of our Sunday School heroes to learn the story behind the story we were taught as youngsters. Some of these folks have dark backstories, some make bad decisions, some are victims of their circumstances, but all of them have more complicated narratives than our little kid brains could take in. Now, as adults, it’s time we hear, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story.

We’re starting at the beginning with Adam and Eve. Everyone knows who they are, even people who don’t believe in God. They are considered to be the mother and father of all humankind. Jesus’ genealogy in Luke traces his lineage all the way back to this first couple. For better or for worse, Adam and Eve got this whole “humanity” thing started.

If you remember the story, you know it didn’t go so well. We learned in Sunday School that a snake told Eve it was OK to eat the apple God told them not to eat, so she does, and then shares it with Adam, and God gets mad and punishes them and kicks them out of the garden. The lesson here is always obey God and don’t talk to snakes. My new house has quite a few snakes living in the back yard, but as much as I’ve tried, I can’t engage any of them in a meaningful conversation.

So, let’s take a closer look at this story to see what we might learn today. In this second version of the Creation Story – the first is in Genesis 1 – God creates man and puts him in the garden to work it and take care of it. I’m currently dealing with some poison ivy, so I’m not thrilled about this charge, but I wasn’t given any input in the decision. I have to trust that Adam knew the difference between a daisy and a dandelion and knew what he was doing.

Or maybe he didn’t, because right after that God literally says, “It’s not good that the man should be alone.” That could be read as a statement about the importance of companionship, or it could be read that Adam needed Eve to keep him from getting a case of poison ivy. As one comedian said, God created woman so someone was around to

say, "Whoa, man!" So, God creates Eve as Adam's helper. Genesis tells us that the man and his wife were naked, and they felt no shame.

When you think about it, they were a lot like toddlers. For most toddlers, clothing is optional. They don't care if they're naked. They'll run around the house all day without clothes on, and much to our chagrin, they'll do the same thing in Target. But at some point in their life, every toddler will become self-conscious about being naked, at least at Target. But for now, Adam and Eve are as innocent as toddlers.

Enter the serpent. The serpent was more crafty or cunning than any of the other creatures. The serpent asks for clarification of God's statement to Adam and Eve. He starts off with, "Did God really say...?" That is a loaded question. When I hear the voice in my head start a question that way, I know I'm in trouble. "Did your mom really say no cookies before dinner? Yes she did! But she didn't say anything about eating a part of a cookie. Or a hunk of cookie dough. Or a scoop of cookie dough ice cream. And ice cream has milk in it, and milk is good for you! You'll be doing your mom a favor!" And so goes the temptation, planting seeds in us that grow into doubts and rationalizations and acts of disobedience.

Here's a question: If God loved Adam and Eve, why the prohibition? God created this beautiful setting for them and gave them dominion and use over the entire garden except for one specific tree, which is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why would God create this tree and then tell Adam and Eve to stay away from it? Let me try to answer that by way of an analogy. Driving is a good thing. I like driving. I'm glad to be able to get places in my car. This summer I'll be teaching my youngest daughter to drive. Your prayers are most appreciated. But driving is not good for a five-year-old. Or how about this: Flying is an amazing luxury. What a privilege to be able to fly in a plane hundreds of miles in a short span of time. But when I go to the airport, they won't let me fly the plane. Only the trained pilots can do that. Or, we tell little kids to keep away from strangers, but we don't go into detail about all the bad things that could happen to them. We give them the knowledge they need and can handle for their age.

I believe God intended for Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when they were ready for it. I believe God wanted Adam and Eve to grow and mature and learn about life in order to be able to handle the knowledge the tree offered, the understanding of the presence of good and evil. They are still toddlers and not developmentally ready for the knowledge the tree would provide. But Adam and Eve couldn't wait, they didn't listen, and gave in to temptation. In a sense, you could say they tried to grow up too fast, to move from spiritual toddlers to adolescence before they were ready.

Notice the result of their transgression: they realize their nakedness and are so ashamed of it they make some clothes to cover themselves. It's the world's first cover-up, and it sets the stage for humanity's continual transgressions against God, and then our feeble attempts to cover them up. For the first time, they are self-conscious in the truest sense. They are conscious of their self apart from God, and that consciousness makes them embarrassed.

In my mind, that is the greatest sin here. It's not the eating of the fruit. It's not even the disobedience. It's their failure to take responsibility for their actions. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, and God has to deal with the mess, because God realizes the consequences of giving us free will. If Adam and Eve were alive today, they

would be filing lawsuits against the serpent. Why? Because then they could blame somebody else for something they did wrong. I believe failure to take responsibility for our actions is one of the worst sins we can commit, because it not only denies the truth about what we have done, it usually shifts the blame to someone else. Adam and Eve made me do it!

So God does something that I believe absolutely broke God's heart. God curses his own creation and then takes Adam and Eve, his two kids, made in his image, and puts them out on the street. God said, "If you live in my garden you will obey my rules!" But they didn't, so now they are going to have to grow up and make it on their own. They no longer have access to the garden and all its delights. They are no longer toddlers. If they want to be adults, they're going to have to act like adults. They are now conscious of their selves and will have to live with that.

What we don't talk about in Sunday School is how much Adam and Eve disappointed God. I'd rather my parents be raging mad at me than disappointed in me. And we've been disappointing God ever since. God has provided everything we need to live, to thrive, and instead we turn to false gods, worshipping idols of our own making, listening to the voices of the slithery serpents around us instead of tuning into the voice of God. Every day we do something that warrants our eviction from God's presence.

And yet, God is still here, watching over us, clothing us. Jesus Christ came to show us that God loves us so much that, in spite of our disobedience, God has clothed us with grace and forgiveness and a tenacious love that refuses to kick us out again. We still have to endure the consequences of our disobedience, but like a loving parent, God still holds us, even when we kick and scream and try to get away.

I really wish Adam and Eve hadn't eaten that fruit. But I'm glad we have this story, because it reminds us that every time we make the same choice – to disobey God, to focus on ourselves, put our own desires above the good of those around us – that God doesn't kick us out. Because of Jesus Christ, we know that God is still with us, loving us, clothing us with the kind of stubborn grace only God can give. Paul writes in Colossians 3, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." God's goodness will always be stronger than our brokenness. Adam and Eve let their brokenness overshadow the light of God inside of them. Every day, we face that choice. And most days, we'll choose wrongly. But scripture tells us that God's mercies are new every morning. Every morning God says, "Try again." So, let's try again today to be the people God created us to be.