

***Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York***  
***Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía***  
***Hempstead, New York***  
***Marianne Tomecek, Interim Pastor***

*The Second Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 5B – June 6, 2021*  
*Genesis 3:8-15, Psalm 130, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1, Mark 3:13-16a, 19b-35*

*Grace and peace to you, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN*

We return to Mark’s gospel today after the post-Easter travels through John, to meet Jesus. He’s just appointed his twelve disciples to take on the public ministry of proclaiming the gospel and healing – reconciliation and salvation. And he’s in the midst of controversy in his hometown. His family think that he’s out of his mind because of his preaching and healing. And a group of scribes has come to Galilee from Jerusalem, and they accuse Jesus of being controlled by Beelzebul; of doing his works through the power of evil.

It is this reference to Satan that leads our text selectors to have included the lesson from Genesis that we commonly refer to as “the Fall.” In this approach to the lesson, a serpent in the garden is identified with Satan; the woman created to be the man’s partner is accused of having caused Adam to sin – “to take a bite from the apple,” raising some vague suggestion about seduction and so interpreters have imposed on us this moral burden for centuries. But a careful reading of Genesis 3 tells us a number of things. First, I’ll read from the beginning of the chapter so that we can have it in mind.

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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.

So we learn that:

- \* the serpent isn't described as being evil or as working in cooperation with Satan, the tempter. It's just another of the creatures God made in the "good" creation, although craftier than the others;
- \* there's nothing seductive about the conversation, unless a serpent's ability to talk to a human being is seen as sexual;
- \* while Eve gave Adam fruit from of the tree in the middle of the garden, which was "desired to make one wise," it wasn't an apple and she didn't force it on him. He was present, listening to the serpent talk to Eve and he could have refused the fruit;
- \* "sin" is not mentioned in the text – not once – although Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instruction about not eating fruit from that tree; and
- \* although God had told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or he would die (Gen 2:17), God had not yet even created Eve at that time, and the couple didn't die after eating the fruit of that tree. All that happened was that their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. And of course, later, God expelled them from Eden.

And we have carried this interpretive insult for hundreds of years. But it was not always so: as early as the second century, Irenaeus, a Greek bishop, had interpreted the Genesis passage without the negative gloss of today.

An equally valid understanding of the event in the garden is that

gaining the knowledge given by the forbidden tree allows the humans to differentiate themselves from the rest of nature. This self-image is necessary for stewardship and care of creation. It also opens the opportunity to know God's goodness in clothing them (Genesis 3:21-22).

Quivik, Melinda, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-10-2/commentary-on-genesis-38-15-2>

This biblical account may also be

a story of human maturation—one could say, of “falling upwards,” as the humans in the garden are moving beyond a childlike state of naivety, their loss of innocence associated with growing up and facing the realities of life in a grownup world.

Claassens, Juliana, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-10-2/commentary-on-genesis-38-15-4>; Lynn M. Bechtel, “Genesis 2.4b-3.24: A Myth About Human Maturation” *JSOT* 67 (1995): 2-26.

The explosion of the account in the garden from the challenge by two of God’s creatures for God’s instructions about life in the garden into the basis for “original sin” of all humanity tells us that we must be careful in how we interpret scripture. It’s easy to paint ancient texts with our own associations and fears, and to do damage as a result.

And how does this inform us about Mark’s description of the dispute between Jesus and the scribes, on the one hand, and Jesus and his family on the other? Jesus tells the former that their logic is off. If he were a demon, he wouldn’t have been able to cast out demons from the people he had healed. A greater power, God’s power, was necessary for that action. He uses the image of a house divided against itself to demonstrate his point.

But the scribes are threatened by Jesus’ popularity among the people, and also likely are fearful about the source of his power, since it was unknown to them and to the culture of the Temple in Jerusalem. So they covered up their fear and ignorance with false accusations.

Similarly, Jesus’ family is concerned about the things he is preaching. They see him as an artisan, not a rabbi. They don’t understand where he gets the things he preaches, so they conclude that he must be out of his mind.

They are concerned with their family's reputation, especially here, in their hometown, so that if his ministry is bringing the scribes from Jerusalem to call him a devil, they have to take action to put a stop to what's going on.

But Jesus knows his origin. And he knows his authority. He understands his call and he can find the familial support from among the people who adopt his ministry and follow him. He will look to ' [w]hoever does the will of God [to be his] ... brother and sister and mother.' (Mark 3:35.)

So we ask ourselves, if we are doing the will of God in our lives. Are we living as disciples, communicating with God regularly through prayer; listening to God's word through prayer, scripture, or the words of fellow disciples; putting the needs of others before our own, so that we are serving God through the gifts of our lives? As a fellow pastor remarked this week, "Discipleship is not a spectator sport." Let's listen for the divine call to "play ball" and be ready to respond!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen**