**Sin and Separation**

Kick off Sunday All ages

Genesis 2: 4b-7, 15-17; 3: 1-8

When I went to a party at Doug Pagitt’s house in 2014, during the Festival of Homiletics, a preaching conference, I had no idea of the connections and opportunities it would lead to. I got to meet some key leaders in the Emerging Church movement, the movement that is living out new ways of being church, including Doug Pagitt and Brian McLaren. I was invited to be a part of an event hosted by Brian McLaren and Convergence, of The United Church of Christ, as the only Canadian. There I met leaders, pastors, and ministers who are initiators of new ministries and programs in this Emerging Church movement.

I was in Minneapolis this summer where Doug lives and pastors at Solomon’s Porch and not only experienced his worship, which you are experiencing elements of this morning, but also was able to have lunch with him and explore sabbatical plans. One of the things he named over this lunch was that he saw me as a networker and connector. I was surprised at that, but have come to see the truth in it and own it as a gift. Many of these connections I and we have benefited from. One of them is with Stan Mitchell, who you may have heard me talk about as the pastor of GracePointe Church near Nashville – an evangelical church that has moved to taking an inclusive stance, welcoming LGBT in 2015. At that Convergence gathering Stan got up and shared some of his reflections about the story we read and have reflected on today. The story known as the Fall and Separation from God. He shared with us his view that there is no separation from God in this story. The story, he says is not about sin, it is about shame. Once they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, they felt shame when God called them. Shame that they were naked, so then that got tied up with being bad.

He has continued to post on his Facebook page his ongoing reflections and learnings including about this story. He has also created a video series of three sessions: *The Myth of Sin and Separation*, which is being offered this fall if there is interest. In relation to this story he says,

So, the serpent's first line of attack was not a temptation to SIN but to SHAME. Before it sought to change Eve's mind about the tree, it sought to change her mind about herself. "Did God REALLY say...?" The dehumanizing implication was the grave temptation. If God was liar then God was not lover. If God was not lover then Eve was not beloved. In fact, she was little more than a played fool, a cuckold of the Divine Cheat. Not enough. SHAME. This is the primal temptation - to lose our sense of BELOVEDNESS.

So the serpent tempted Eve to not believe what she was told, and that tempted her to believe that God did not love her. That is the sin, to go down a path where we think God does not or will not love us. God loves us as we are, there is no reason to feel shame.

Stan also shared:

The real "Fall of Humanity" is when we "Fall" for the lie that our sins separate us from God. Like Adam & Eve, our gravest "Fall" is not our sin. Rather, our greatest spiritual blunder is to be afraid of God because of our imperfections - to hide, alienate or estrange ourselves from the One we could actually never separate from. So then, to believe God could ever leave us, this is the ultimate "Fall." Even then, we do our "falling" inside the heart of God - the place we have always safely lived.

God did not leave humanity. God came out of the Garden with Adam and Eve, but that is next week’s story. God is with us. We have the understanding and knowledge of what is good and what is bad. How much do we focus on each? When we watch the news, we mostly only hear the bad, so we can get a skewed version of the reality of life, but there is so much love and goodness in the world. God is with us and present in that love everywhere.

So I invite you to discuss and reflect on the following:

There is much that is bad or considered evil in the world. There is much that can be named bad or evil or be misleading information in the world. There are things that separate us from God. What tempts us that causes us to think we are separate from God? What is your experience of this in the world, in your life? What gives you hope?

You will find some leaves on the table.

Discuss:

What is bad in the world? What turns us away from God?

Or the questions from the beginning story:

So who do you blame when you find yourself in a

mess?

How good are you at forgiving?

Who do you blame for the world’s troubles?

When was the last time you hugged a snake?

What gives us hope? Where do we find hope?

Write or draw the hope on your leaf.