

Sermon 022518 Sin
Scripture Genesis 2: 15-17; 3: 1-7,
Sermon Title- The Forbidden Fruit

I think I was around eight years old when it happened. I had in me an aroused sense of adventure, a thirst for danger. I was in a place that I should not have been...my parents' bedroom. I was doing something that I should not have been doing...going through my mother's purse. I found in the change purse one shiny quarter.

I had the experience of temptation and I yielded to it. I put the quarter in my pocket and flew out the door, onto my bike, and headed right to the Files Farm. Ben Files was the father of my friend Sheila. He had horses, goats, a huge garden from which he sold vegetables, and a penny candy store. I now had a quarter and a new-found sense of power. I had taken control of my own destiny and was free to do exactly what I pleased with my fortune. My studied decision was to spend it all on penny candy. I also had acquired anxiety and guilt in the bargain. Guilt was now mine not only for stealing, but also for stealing from the person whom I most loved, my Mom. Anxiety was now mine because I had never done anything like this before. I had let temptation get the better of me. I had left behind goodness and innocence and was in new and untested territory of a life of crime.

This was a period in American history in which penny candy cost a penny. I bought twenty -five pieces of candy and rode to a

private spot at a place the neighborhood kids called the Ressie. I ate every piece of candy and promptly threw it all up. That was actually the nicest result of my caper. By the time, I got home a few hours later, my mother had discovered my theft. She told me how hurt she was at what I had done, and sent me to my room to think about it and wait for my father to come home. I was miserable. I felt cut off from my mother in a terrible way. My father came home. He was predictably angry and warmed my backside with fervor and gusto. I would like to go on record as saying that I would every time prefer angering and being hit by my father over hurting my mother's feelings.

Now, nobody will ever describe this story as the crime of the century, except for maybe me. It was my 'Fall from Grace.' It was the moment in my life that I first sinned, big time. It was a 10 Commandment sin, no doubt about it. God knew and had probably already marked my sentence on me. I had the thought that when I die, I'm going to have to deal with this. It was one of the most exciting things that ever happened to me. It was a bad feeling, but it wasn't all-bad. I had power. I had broken out of a lifetime of obedience and grabbed hold of my own destiny. I tasted freedom. I had experienced temptation and bought in. It took courage...more courage than brains, but it took courage. I felt more alive, more alone, than I ever had. It also gave me a taste of

anxiety. Not the anxiety of the fear of monsters under the bed, but the anxiety of leaving behind the life of a dreamingly innocent boy and entering the high-risk life of sin and crime. The acquisition of power brought to me a sense of separation. I felt separated not only from my mother, but also my father and the rest of the God fearing, law-abiding world.

My story is unique in some ways, but the experience is universal. Sooner or later, we all fall from innocence to sin. Sooner or later, we all feel the separation from our God, each other and even ourselves. It is part of becoming fully human. It is the experience of knowing right from wrong and exercising the freedom to act upon that knowledge.

In our famous scripture reading today, Adam and Eve have the most famous and spectacular ‘Fall’ story of all. It is the most analyzed story in the history of stories. Once upon a time, Adam sinned and brought death to the world, depicts the story from Genesis. As accurate as the Eden myth is in its depiction of human fall from innocence, it is not a ‘once upon a time’ story. The fall from innocence happens to all of us. We all experience temptation and yield to it.

I learned as a boy in Sunday school that we got sinfulness from Adam. His (and Eve’s) fall from grace happened when they picked and ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and

evil. The crafty serpent convinced them that they would gain the power of God, take control of their own destiny, if they just took and ate that fruit. The Roman Catholic nuns in Sunday school taught me that Adam's selfishness is what we inherited as 'Original Sin.' That story has been known since as 'The Fall of Man' or 'The Fall of Adam.'

I now see that so called 'Fall of Adam' in a different light. Now I see the 'Fall' story in Genesis as not a one-time thing that happened in pre-history. Instead, this 'Fall' story from Genesis is an extraordinary depiction of the path that *we all take*. It happened to me when I was eight years old. The human 'fall from innocence' happens to all of us.

Like Adam and Eve in the Bible, what we all experience is the moment when we grab the freedom that is available to us and try take control over our own destiny. We all experience temptation and fall to it. Our destiny is not some strange, distant force that decides our future. Our destiny is the playing field in which we exercise our freedom. Our destiny is largely determined by our own behavior. Our destiny is what we make it. Will your destiny be full of sin and evil or will your destiny be full of God and righteousness? You get to decide.

The way the Garden of Eden story unfolds, the first thing that God gave us was life and the second thing God gave us was

freedom. The first thing we did with freedom was sin. Adam and Eve had human potential in their innocence, but they did not become fully human until they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We all reach a point of the knowledge of good and evil. We all reach a point when we exercise our freedom and become fully human.

So, it begs a question. The question is, ‘Is this Genesis story really a fall?’ Is our acquisition of and exercise of freedom a bad thing or is it a gift from God? To paraphrase the great 20th century theologian, Paul Tillich: We are free to ask questions about ourselves and the world. We are free to understand and internalize moral and ethical lessons. We are free to have imaginations that can soar. We are free to accept challenges of building tools, products, machines, and structures. We are free to express ourselves artistically, theoretically, and develop human organizations. We are free to contradict ourselves and free to strive and free to sin. So, is the acquisition of freedom really a fall or is it a gift?

What we do with our freedom really depends upon us. We exist in this world as individuals, but as individuals who are interconnected with the world. We exist in many ways as a part of groups; yet, we also exist alone. We are beings unto ourselves who experience separation and loneliness. We interact with our

world and the world interacts with us in complex and dynamic ways. Some of our freedom is regulated by our world and some of our freedom is completely up to us. It is not our abilities that make us who we are, it is our choices.

We do have a guide. We have in Jesus Christ a new start. When Christ arrived on the scene, it changed everything. Our Gospel story last Sunday from Matthew tells of the devil trying to tempt Jesus into sinning. Jesus shows us a way to exercise freedom but for the good, not for sinning. Christ underwent the human experience of temptation. We heard about that last week when we looked at the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness.

Christ subjected himself to the experience of human existence and suffering. Like us, Jesus experienced temptation, pain, suffering, and death. In His unity with God, in His serenity and majesty, in His expression of love for us, He leads us away from sin. He gives us a new way of being, as it says in today's Gospel, new life. Christ closed the human gaps between himself and the world; himself and God. By closing the gaps of separation, himself, he closes the gaps for us, if we only let him.

Remember the prayer that Jesus taught us in the Bible? We call it the Lord's Prayer. Remember, there is a line in it that says, "Deliver us from evil." Evil takes many forms; including human

sinfulness. Jesus is the path of deliverance away from evil and sin. We can do this by following how he lived his life on earth. We have the freedom to choose forgiveness, compassion, love and healing. We have the freedom to choose honesty, trustworthiness, kindness, and righteousness. Freedom is a gift from God. We get to choose how we will use our freedom, for good or evil. I didn't think of that when I stole that quarter so many years ago.

But now I know that I have the freedom to choose goodness over evil. But it is still so easy to slip back into selfish ways. That is why we need to return to our Lord and his lessons over and over again in our lives. That is a good reason to come to church... to be reminded. When we follow Christ in what we say, what we do, and who we are, we will be free to reconnect with God, each other, and ourselves. It is up to us. We are free to choose. The only thing at stake is our destiny and the destiny of the world. AMEN