



Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church
Connecting faith with everyday life

Sermon Archives

Date: August 13, 2017

Title: "Adam and Eve, Part One: The First Love Story"

Scripture: Genesis 1: 26-34, 2:4-9, 15-22

Description: Let's consider the story of Adam and Eve as being, not about sin and disobedience, but about the single most important issue in life. It's a story of love. The first story in the Bible is about the most important thing in the Bible: how to live in love.

Intro:

For 3,000 years, one story has remained. One story has served as the description of all that is beautiful and what went wrong. It's the story of two people, the story of Adam and Eve. For some, that story is historical fact. For others, it is mythical fiction. Either way, it has much to offer us. The story of Adam and Eve.

Like many good stories, it was created, produced, and distributed in an original version, then later told in a revised edition. Like the *Phantom of the Opera*, written as a novel in 1910, then a silent movie in 1925, then Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical in 1986.

Listen now to the first version of the Opening Act: Genesis 1:26-34

In this version, both man and woman are created at the same time, both explicitly in the image of God. The second version is quite different and immediately follows in Genesis 2:4-9, 15-22.

End of the story of Adam and Eve, Act One. In the next chapter, we reach the heart of the story. It's all about man, woman, serpent, sex, desire, deception, sin, death.

Look at the heading in your Bible "The First Sin and Its Punishment", or in the older King James Version, "The Temptation and the Fall of Man.") It's all about "original sin."

Only...what if it isn't? Remember, the headings are not part of scripture; they've been inserted by the publishers. Because they're helpful, like when you're looking for the passage about Jesus feeding 5,000. Sometimes the headings can be misleading. Luke, 15 contains the "Parable of the Prodigal Son. The headline has told us that all our lives. Only, what if it had been named, "The Story of Two Brothers." Instead of focusing on the scandalous misbehavior of the prodigal brother, maybe we would have given equal attention to the religious brother, who also missed his Father's joy because he was looking down his nose at his misbehaving sibling. Or what if all our lives this story had been given the title of

"The Forgiving Father" and we had always known that at its heart, the Parable is about the Father's wild love, lavished on both his boys.

Let's give the story of Adam and Eve a different headline. What if the origin of sin and guilt are not the main point? What if sin and guilt are not even the main issue in life? What if in this story, God offers much to help us with our primary challenge, the most important task in life—the challenge of living in love. "The greatest of these is love," the Bible teaches. What if the first story in the Bible is about love.

When we look at it that way, we see surprising things.

At first, it was all good. Seven times the creation story uses the word "good" to describe what God had made. One time only, the words "not good" appear. Genesis 2:8—"It is *not good* for him to be alone." The words "original sin", "fall", "disobedience," or even "temptation" never actually appear in the Bible's version of this story. Instead, the simple declaration, "It is not good for him to be alone."

We hear a lot of stories about individuals these days: One person, one hero, one warrior, one genius, one lone gunman. This is not one of those stories. This is a story about two people. Learning to be together. Learning to live as one. The story of our beginning is not about one person. It's about a relationship between two people.

We were made for love. We were made out of love and we were made for love. You may guard your independence and your individual rights and your autonomy above everything else and this may lead to success and power and even moral superiority. But I'm not sure it leads to serenity, joy, or a real sense of fulfillment. We were made for love.

Love is not just falling-in-love romance. It is a certain way of being alive. In recent history, we have taken all our need for closeness and placed them on the shoulders of our marriage. Our marriages are feeling the strain of that weight. Guys need friendships with guys; women need conversations that happen only between females. Children and grandparents, teammates, colleagues at work, a Sunday School class circled for a closing time of prayer—we need all kinds of closeness. Living a life is too overwhelming to be done on your own. We become only fully ourselves when we are with one another.

But what about the snake? The Garden of Eden has been described as a perfect place. But there are clues that from the beginning, the relationship between Adam and Eve contained flaws. Deep love, real love always contains flaws. In this story, the flaws appear with the entrance of the serpent.

The snake is Satan, of course. We all know that. Even if the Bible doesn't know that, or at least doesn't say that. That identity has been inserted into the story by religious leaders through the ages, almost all of whom, by the way, were exclusively male. I'm just saying. In ancient times, serpents almost always represented bad stuff: guile, black magic. But they were also sometimes associated with health and wellness, such as the serpent that's still included in the symbol of the medical world.

"Did God say you shouldn't eat of that tree?" inquires the serpent. "Just asking." Eve answers (3:2) (*JENNIE*) "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but 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.'"

Thing is, God hadn't actually said that to Eve. Because Eve hadn't been created when God gave the instructions to Adam. Here's what God told Adam: (2:16-17) (*ANDY*) ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Adam passed on these instructions to Eve. Look at them side-by-side; do you see the difference?

Eve tells the serpent, "*nor shall you touch it...*" God hadn't said anything about not even touching the tree. Maybe Adam thought it best that the woman not be trusted to go anywhere near the tree. Is it possible to be more religious than God? Is it possible to set the standards higher, to make the restrictions more exacting, to draw the boundaries tighter than God? If so, what are the consequences?

Why did Eve eat? The Bible does tell us: she wanted to be wise. She wasn't looking for power, fame, beauty, money. She wants wisdom. She wants to know. She is the first to not accept what she's been told by others, but insists on knowing for herself. This can cause a lot of pain. But it can be a way of realizing, "If I don't know for myself, I can't know for real."

So Eve ate. And she didn't die, not drop-dead-on-the-spot-die the way Lot's wife would later do. But she did gain knowledge. What did she do next? (v. 6) "...and she also gave some to her husband,...and he ate."

From the beginning, their relationship had not been between equals. Adam had come first; Adam had named all the creatures; he was bigger and physically stronger. Adam was number one in so many ways. Suddenly, Eve was wise. She was superior in that crucial way—she knew what was going on. She got it.

She looked at Adam. He was so oblivious. He didn't have a clue. "Now who's superior, Big Guy?" She could use this wisdom for herself in so many ways.

Instead, she gave some to Adam. She chose equality over superiority. She chose to share what could have been her great advantage. She gave to Adam, and he ate.

"...and he ate." Why does Adam eat? Maybe he was intimidated. Maybe he was tricked and simply fooled. Maybe he decided to rebel against God as well. Maybe. Maybe Adam doesn't want to lose his bride. True, she hadn't dropped dead, but Adam could see that something inside her had died already. He couldn't exactly describe what it was, but it wasn't pretty. He could sense the distance already growing between them.

He decides to do what's best for Adam. He makes his choice. He makes an unforced decision to be with Eve. He could cast his lot with God and lose Eve, or cast his lot with Eve and lose God. He opts for the latter. He chooses love over obedience, love over rightness.

He was the first, but he wasn't the only one. "Why do you permit your disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath?" they asked Jesus. "It isn't lawful to heal on the Sabbath!" the Pharisees protested after Jesus restored sight. "He eats with publicans and sinners," the religious lawyers accused. Did you know that the Bible calls Jesus "the second Adam?" Adam was the first, but not the last to choose love over law.

You ever had to make that choice? Whatever the story teaches about sin and obedience, it teaches the truth about love. Real love is messy. Real love requires hard choices. Real love will make you decide between being right or being in love. Is that the way you've experienced it? I hate that, because I so love being right.

Romance doesn't make that demand. You ever fallen head-over-heels in love? Was it a rational, conscious decision on your part. No way. You were swept off your feet, hit by a train. You may have had a crush on your third grade teacher who was your mother's age, happily married, and had children of her own older than you. That didn't matter. Falling in love is involuntary. Staying in love, on the other hand, is very voluntary.

Adam had his love handed to him on a silver platter when God put him to sleep, then simply presented Eve to him. The very first "no-brainer." Adam was smitten. Now, for the first time, Adam must decide. For the first time, he must get off the fence, even if it costs him. And he does. "All in," he declares and pushes every chip onto the table. He eats the fruit. He chooses love.

God the Father, Son, and Spirit watch from above in silence. "You saw that coming, didn't you," the Son asks the Father. "Now what?" they ponder. "Apparently they are indeed made in our image," observes the Son, "Choosing love over righteousness. But I have an idea. I can do that, too." They began to devise a plan. Word of their scheme spread throughout heaven. Frankly, some of the archangels were strongly opposed. But from within The Trinity, there was no hesitation. Then one cold winter night, angels appeared to shepherds keeping watch over their flock, and from a manger could be heard the sound of a baby's cry.

"The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." (First Corinthians 15:45)