



Life Together: Be Yourself

Genesis 3:8-13

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This morning, let's take a walk in the garden.

Jen and I have been watching this show on Netflix in recent weeks called, *Chef's Table*. It highlights some of the best chefs in the world. Each episode focuses on one chef as it tells their story. The show goes back in time, and it talks about where and how the chef grew up, and how they got into cooking. It takes you on a personal journey as it explains how this chef became one of the top chefs – Michelin star rated chefs – chefs running some of the best restaurants in the world.

One of the common threads among these globally recognized chefs is their desire for the best ingredients. In order to have the best ingredients, almost all of them grow their own produce in specialized gardens. Without fail, the cinematography catches them walking down the aisles of their gardens, running their hands along the tops of their produce. They'll stop and pick off a few leaves, rub them between their hands and smell them – they'll walk some more, pick some berries and taste them. The garden provides everything they need to cook some of the best dishes in the world.

As they walk in their gardens, there is this Zen like calm. As they talk about their gardens, there is this gratitude for the unexpected abundance that is produced from the earth.

When I think of the first of creation, when I think of that Garden of Eden, I picture a similar visual. I see Adam and Eve walking through the abundant growth of the garden, running their hands through the leaves of the bushes – picking the unknown fruits to eat – smelling the sweet scent of what we know as mint, or rosemary, or thyme, or lavender. The Garden provides everything they need – the freshest of ingredients. Qualified organic products.

It's pristine. ... But like every garden, it has its pests.

The serpent, said to be the craftiest of creatures, spoke to the woman, saying, "Did God say you shouldn't be eating the fruit that comes from the trees in the garden?" The serpent is the first character of the Biblical text to talk about God, without talking to God. The serpent is crafty – perhaps one would say, manipulative.

The woman responds, "We were told we *could* eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. Though, God did say, we could *not* eat of the one tree in the middle of the garden."

The garden has a center; the visual becomes more real. There is a tree in the center, around which, the rest of the garden flows – it is a focal point. And yet, it is a focal point that is off limits.

Eve continues, “We can’t touch the fruit of *that* tree, or we shall die.”

The serpent, as if expecting Eve’s answer, doesn’t hesitate to respond, “You will not die. God knows that when you eat the fruit of that tree, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

The serpent’s lie was sufficient. The next time Eve went by the tree, she took a look at the fruit. She realized it was edible ... and not just edible, it was beautiful – it *looked* good. Not to mention, the fruit made one wise – it provided greater wisdom. So, she took the fruit off the tree and ate it. Adam was with her (she didn’t have to go look for him, he was *with her*); so she gave him some to eat as well.

Immediately their eyes were opened. They saw in a new way. They realized, having eaten of the fruit, that neither was clothed – it was a thought, a mental process, a realization they had no prior capacity to think. So, to cover themselves, to hide what they did not previously know needed any covering, they sewed fig leaves as clothing. That which was once the place of beauty and abundance has become the place of shame, and there doesn’t seem to be enough fig leaves to hide their failure.

There are many theological takes on this well-known Biblical story – some are far worse than others. Some use the text to argue that Eve is the temptress of Adam, and thus, all women are the temptresses of all men. On the other hand, some use the story to argue that Eve is the one who demonstrates a healthy desire for wisdom, and this is why all women are wiser. Some argue Adam’s infatuation, saying he was simply convinced by Eve’s allure that it was ok to eat the fruit, and they claim this is why men are so quick to follow women. Others argue this demonstrates Adam’s failure to stop Eve, since he was with her at the time she picked the fruit, and thus they claim men are more willing to benefit from another’s failure.

I’m not sure I buy into many, if any, of the hot takes that try to equate Eve’s acts with the acts of all women, ever ... nor do I think it offers a definitive take on the personality of all men, ever. What we do know is that eventually, when pressed, Adam points to Eve, and Eve points to the serpent. So, let’s back up to the serpent.

At the start, the serpent’s invitation to Eve was to offer a greater wisdom. The serpent claimed that eating the fruit would give her greater knowledge. ... Wisdom – knowledge – is lifted up as a righteous pursuit throughout the Biblical text. Consider Proverbs 4:5, which reads, “Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.” Proverbs 2:9-10, read, “Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.” Seeking

wisdom is a righteous pursuit. So, having been told the fruit could make them wise, they eat the fruit.

And yet, the wisdom they received seems to be insufficient.

The wisdom makes them aware of their nakedness, so they clothe themselves. Having made clothes from fig leaves, Adam and Eve hear the footsteps of God in the garden. They hear the rustling of the leaves under his walk. In fear that God might find them in the garden in their new state of enlightenment, they hid themselves. Again, their newfound wisdom seems insufficient.

There are two really interesting pieces of this text to me. The first comes when God speaks. God asks of Adam and Eve, "Where are you?"

Did God not know where they were? Did God not know what had happened already? We profess a belief in an omniscient and omnipresent God – so, do we really think God was unaware? Certainly not. Professor Miguel De La Torre offers of God's questioning, "To ask the question indicates that the trust undergirding God's relationship with humans has been broken."ⁱ Like the parent who asks their only child, "Did you break this plate?" The knowledge of the fault is to be assumed. The question is, will the one who has failed own their mistake?

Leading to the second thing that interests me, which is the response of Adam and Eve to God's question.

Though Adam and Eve were both in the garden, Adam is the one who responds first. And again, Adam's response makes it clear that the newfound wisdom is ... well, it's not what it could be. Adam is attempting to hide from God. He is trying to make it so God doesn't find out about their eating of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. And yet, Adam says, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid, for I knew that I was naked; so I hid myself." Adam gives himself up! He's trying to hide from God, and yet, he cannot deny the reality.

Now, perhaps it's the serpent in me speaking, but I can't help but wonder if a wiser – or craftier way to claim innocence in that moment would have been to walk out to speak with God with no fig leaves covering his body as if nothing had happened. Perhaps Adam could have played dumb – and acted as if everything were normal – that he was unaware of his current state.

But no – though Adam tried to hide the truth, he was unable.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever been to a social gathering, or walked into work, or been visiting with family, or perhaps you were gathered here, at the church, for worship, and someone asked, "How are you today?" And like Adam, you tried to hide the truth, saying something like, "I'm great, how are you?"

I can't help but wonder how many years of conditioning it takes for us to believe that we have to always put on a good face – we have to “be great,” or mask the present reality of our troubles. How hard do we work to mask our true self-identity by creating this fake social-identity, through which we seek to convince others that we are something different – someone more perfect than what really exists, as if our less-than-perfect selves are somehow insufficient.

In this *Life Together* worships series, we're looking at how we, as a local, national, and global community might live in better relationship with each other. How do we work to ensure more equity and peace among creation? When we look at some of the turmoil around us, I can't help but think that, if we were more able to name our faults – to own our failures – to claim we are less than perfect as individuals, or as a collective whole, we might be able to better live into God's desired shalom for humanity. If we can name our errors, perhaps we can seek redemption.

Yet, I think too many of us – and many of us together as a collective identity – act a lot like Adam and Eve in the garden. We first want to be like God – trying to claim the knowledge and power of God for ourselves. And, having failed in our attempt to become god-like, knowing the Creator is walking nearby, we attempt to hide the reality of our brokenness. Only, in our attempt to hide the brokenness, we end up not only hiding from God, but also from one another, and often, even from ourselves.

Like Adam and Eve, when fault is sought, when someone needs to take responsibility, we attempt to point fingers at others to mitigate our own guilt. Like Adam who points to Eve, and Eve who points to the serpent, so too do we often seek to place blame on others when our guilt is simply being one to benefit from the guilt of others. “This ultimate solidarity, the solidarity of sin, in which [Adam and Eve] are now united in God's sight, is not recognized by them.”ⁱⁱ United in their guilt, neither was willing to take responsibility for their own participation in the act of wrongdoing – and yet, both were wrong, even if just in benefiting from the wrong. It was not Eve's idea, and it was not Adam's action ... and yet, both were complicit in the wrongdoing. Both benefited from the wrongful act.

In our nation, it is not hard to prove that men have long been the beneficiaries of power that has been handed down from generation to generation. Even if the sin of sexism started with the invitation of a serpent in generations past, if, like Eve and Adam, we receive the fruit of the sin, and do not refuse its beautiful appearance, we can hardly claim to be innocent of the guilt.

In our nation, it is not hard to prove that the white community has long been the beneficiaries of power that has been handed down from generation to generation. Even if the sin of racism started with the invitation of a serpent in generations past, if, like Eve and Adam, we continue to receive the fruit of the sin, and do not refuse its sweet taste, we can hardly claim to be innocent of the guilt.

We might try to hide our participation, or the shame of our guilt, by hiding among the leaves and branches – blending in with the world around us. But before God, when God comes

looking, we must still answer to the one who is the Creator. God will ask, and is asking, “Where are you?” And we will be expected to respond.

And I get that this is challenging. It’s hard claiming one’s personal participation and benefit from sin that started centuries ago. And, yet, I don’t know a single person who claims to not be a sinner. In the Christian community, we all look back to Adam and Eve and say, we are sinful – even from a 30,000 ft macro-level view – because of the original sin of Adam and Eve. We are not sinners simply because we once failed to be obedient to God in our lifetime – we are sinful because we are part of humanity, all of whom are sinful because of the act of the first of humanity in the garden.

So, the challenge isn’t that we don’t know how to claim fault because of someone’s prior fault – that’s part of our Christian identity. It’s Biblical. Romans 5 says, “By the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” It’s ok to name the reality of what is. By the start of racism in America, the many were made racists. By the start of sexism in America, the many were made sexists. ... We don’t have to go back to identify the serpent to put blame on – if you pay attention, God never questions the serpent – but we can still claim participation because, like sin, we relish in its fruit.

But sin is not the end of the story. There’s more – through acknowledgment of what is, by naming the sin that exists, by naming our participation and benefit from it, freedom is possible. Yes, “By the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners,” but also, “by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” We can claim our guilt, because we know that our guilt can and will be redeemed. We don’t have to continue to live into the same sinful ways, racist ways, sexist ways ... we can be changed, because of God’s love as witnessed in Jesus Christ.

Because of God’s love in Jesus Christ, we can claim our sin, we can be made new, and we can have a new life that exemplifies God’s love. Life won’t necessarily be the same – things are going to change. Jesus never says that following him is going to be easy. But when we come before God, when we look at Christ, high and risen up, we do not have to shy away from the reality of what is. We don’t have to hide in the garden. We don’t have to hide our true selves from one another. We can be honest, open, and share in life together, claiming our bests and our worsts, our joys and our pains, our dreams and our fears – because we have nothing to hide. And for those things we are trying to hide, the fig leaves won’t work for long.

May we name it, own it, lift it up to the Lord, and may the Lord lead us to a new life in Christ, that we may truly be God’s people. Amen.

ⁱ Miguel A. De La Torre. *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible: Genesis*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

ⁱⁱ Gerhard von Rad. *Genesis, Revised Edition: The Old Testament Library*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961.