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“Sin and a Better Option”

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

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The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but 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."

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'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 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.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

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. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 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.

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

The customer turns to the short order cook and says, "If Eve had tried to tempt Adam with a Brussels sprout, we'd still be living in paradise."

The oldest computer can be traced back to Adam and Eve. It was an apple. But with extremely limited memory. Just one byte. Then everything crashed.

The best jokes are self-deprecating. A Russian comedian tells this one: An Englishman, Frenchman, and Russian are looking at a painting of Adam and Eve. The Frenchman says, "Adam and Eve must be French. They're beautiful, and naked, and have all the world's beauty before them." The Englishman says, "Not at all. They're residing in a beautiful, perfect garden. They must be English." The Russian says, "They have no clothes, two people are sharing one apple, they're being watched, and told it's paradise. They're definitely Russian."

We have gotten used to not taking this story seriously, so we have to really listen to recognize that it is our story, our problem, and our hope.

Once upon a time the Creator and the ones God created lived in trust. The poetic image in Genesis is they "walked together in the cool of the day." Robert Ensign describes the garden as green and leafy with a waterfall, splashing by a clear pool. Warm sun, easy shade. Trees loaded with apples, grapes, pears, and bananas. A cool breeze blowing.

A man and a woman. They would run through the garden together, laughing and singing, playing hide-and-seek like a couple of kids. They would climb the trees and eat the fruit. They would swim in the clear water of the pool and splash by the waterfall. They would rest in the warm sun and the cool breeze.

The life the man and the woman shared, the end of their loneliness, was such a gift. Life was sacramental,

with every moment, every morsel of food, every beautiful surprise leading directly to God, the giver of good gifts. God is a parent trying to protect God's children from the dangers of life, knowing that they will experience failures and pain, because that is the cost of freedom.

The serpent suggested it first. He ever so subtly begins to cast aspersions on the Creator: "Did God tell you not to eat that? Why would God say such a thing? You don't need to listen to all God's do's and don'ts."

They have all they need—enough food, enough drink, enough work, enough rest, enough friendship, enough companionship, and enough love. Peace of mind. They have each other. But they want more.

They have all they could ever want—beautiful sights, sweet smells, pleasing sounds, delicious tastes, and reassuring touch. They could run when they feel like running, sleep when they feel like sleeping, and eat when they feel like eating. But they wanted more.

They had God who loved them, protected them, and cared for them. God gave them the freedom of the garden, let them make up their own minds, and gave them just a few rules to keep them out of trouble. But they wanted more.

They did not just want the beautiful garden to live in and enough food to eat. They wanted to own the garden. They did not want just the sights and sounds and smells of the garden—they wanted to control the garden. They did not want God who loved, protected, and cared for them.

They wanted to become like God. To do whatever they wanted, to make their own rules.

More became their only obsession. More became their

only thought. More became their only desire. Until it all crashed. They lost everything. They lost the garden. They lost the cool breeze. In some ways, they lost each other. They lost themselves.

They wanted more. They reached for more. They grabbed more. They ended up with nothing. The sky covered itself with clouds. The trees began to shake and drop their leaves. The cool breeze turned into a hurricane. The wind sounded like a voice shouting at them, warning them, chilling them. (This is Robert Ensign's interpretation.)

The garden became a graveyard, a wilderness. Paradise is lost. Innocence is gone. Adam and Eve hide.

God asks, "Whose fault is this?" Church tradition, dominated by old men, has tended to blame Eve, but Saint Paul blames Adam. He never mentions Eve. Adam is the one who says, "This woman who you gave me."

The nerve of some men, but the woman's defense is much the same, "The serpent tricked me. It's anybody's fault but mine."

That is how they lived the rest of their lives outside the garden, wanting more, and blaming each other. Mom and Dad taught their three sons how to grab for more and put the blame on somebody else.

Abel, the beautiful child, the golden boy, wanted everything and managed to get what he wanted. Abel never seemed to make mistakes, except one. One day he went for a walk with his brother. Abel talked too much about how successful he was. His first mistake. His last mistake.

Cain, the less impressive child, the outcast, wanted everything his brother had and blamed his brother when he

did not get it. Cain blamed his brother to the point that he knew that if he could just get rid of his brother, it would be his. He spent the rest of his life carrying a load of guilt.

Adam and Eve taught them about blaming and wanting more. Genesis suggests Adam and Eve invented denying, pointing fingers, and assigning blame. They are the first cover-up, the first refusal to accept responsibility, and the first ones to play the victim card.

They pass it along to their third son, Seth, and his children—and their children and their children and their children. Generation after generation wanted more. And when they got more, they would want still more.

They would steal from each other, because they wanted more. They would kill each other, because they wanted more. They would fight wars, because they wanted more. If it did not work out, they could always find someone to blame.

Blame the government. Blame the bureaucrats. Blame the school. Blame the church. Blame the minorities. Blame the majorities. Blame the internet. Blame Fox news. Blame their parents, their families, their bosses, and their enemies. Blame anyone but themselves.

Adam and Eve taught them well. Parents taught their children, who taught their children. Even when they tried not to teach their children, it seemed like some kind of disease, a sickness passed from one generation to the next. When would it ever stop? Eve saw no hope. No hope at all for her children.

But Adam and Eve are not our only ancestors. There is someone else who has claimed us as his kin, and we hear his story, too. The Spirit led him not into a garden, but into

a wilderness, where he too was tested, but he passed. His test was harder. There was nothing as clear-cut as a tree to stay away from, no specific instructions from God about what not to do.

Jesus and the devil engage in a verbal duel. Satan quotes scripture, chapter and verse. Just because someone knows the Bible does not mean they are up to any good. Jesus could turn the desert into a French bakery, or he could live with the ache in his stomach, as hungry and tired as anyone would be after a six-week fast.

Three times he was tempted. Three times he said, "No." No to going along with what we are supposed to want. No to wanting more when we have enough. No to thinking we cannot do better. Jesus would not sell his soul for the kingdoms of the world—"Worship the Lord your God. Serve God alone." Somehow, he managed to say no to these tantalizing possibilities and came out of the desert the same person he had gone in, a beloved child of God.

There is another story. The crowd shouts, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Jesus carries the cross up the hill and dies on it. It is a long way from the peace of the garden. Nails tearing the flesh of his hands and feet. Blood dripping from his head. Anguish on his face.

Somehow, we are all part of it. Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel. Jesus and Satan. You and me. Somehow, we are part of the suffering of God. The one who hung on the cross, who instead of saying, "More," said, "Enough." Instead of avoiding responsibility, instead of blaming everyone else, he said, "This is what God's love looks like."

God hangs on the cross as the cost of freedom. God hangs on the cross in the pain of forgiveness. God hangs

on the cross to love us to a better way. Christ shows us the way beyond the sickness, reveals the hope beyond the disease that passes from one generation to the next. Christ helps us unlearn the evil we have learned. Christ will lead us back to the garden, back to the cool breeze.

But we need to understand that this story is about our sickness, our sin, and our foolishness. It is easy to recognize the speck in another's eye and miss the cross in our own. Easy to be stubborn children wanting to be in charge. Easy to think more of ourselves and less of others. Easy to think our kind of greed is okay and everyone else's greed is wrong. Easy to think people like us should have more control, and those unlike us should have less control. Easy to use people who help us get what we want, and keep our distance from the rest. Easy to believe there are two kinds of Christians—those who agree with us and those who are not as smart as we are.

Any time we go down the trail of dividing the world into us and them, sin goes on and on. We are the good people who should be in charge. They are the bad ones who should not be in charge. We are good. They are evil. Thinking of us and them is turning down a garden of love in favor of a desert of self-centeredness.

We are always becoming someone different, always choosing our direction. We are either becoming people of grace or people of judgment, welcoming everyone or being self-righteous, becoming more like Jesus Christ or becoming less like the loving daughters and sons God wants us to be.

The most difficult line in the Lord's Prayer may be "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." We need to confess our sins, forgive others' sins, and

give thanks for God's love, because if life is a spelling bee, there is no hope for any of us. None of us spell life exactly right. There is a little bit of George Santos in us all.

We confess our selfishness, self-interest, and self-centeredness, so that we can live in grace. We need to understand that life is a gift from the one whose love is deeper than our selfishness. God is not so interested in what we did in the past as in what we have learned from the past, and what we are going to do with those lessons in the future.

This is our hope—that God's goodness is bigger than our badness. By the grace of God, we become different people. By the grace of God, the future is more beautiful than the past.

Adam and Christ are both alive and well in us. We can feel them both tugging at us most days, but if Adam's story is our story, then Jesus' story is ours as well. God offers to create clean hearts, to renew the Spirit within us. God will open our eyes to the gift of God's grace, the joy of God's love, and the hope of God's kindness. God invites us to walk together in the garden of God's goodness.

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