

## What are Your Desires?

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

He said they'd decided to just settle in for the evening. They had some fresh salmon and some wine and they were going to sit down and watch the Super Tuesday election results come in. The call came from friends in Southern Illinois, last Tuesday night in the midst of all those tornadoes out that way. My friend said that there were twenty of them on the local weather map as he spoke. So, they had decided to just settle in for the evening. Well, we would say that's only good common sense, although that doesn't guarantee your safety in a tornado. You don't want to be outside driving around in that kind of stuff. It's only good common sense to recognize the limits and boundaries of life! But, the fact is, we only call it good common sense when that's what we're going to do, right? Because when we want to, we do all sorts of things that completely ignore human life's limits and boundaries. We decide that we're exempt, somehow.

Well, in the church it's the season of Lent, a season of six weeks of preparation for the celebration of Easter. And so, Lent is a time when we go back to basics. It's a time when we try to pause and think again about who we are in God's world, who we are in relation to God and in relation to each other and creation. And so it's a good time to preach on some of these stories in Genesis which reflect on just those questions. The stories in Genesis 2 & 3 tell us that God gives us a good life, but a life with responsibilities and limits for what it means to be human. It's a good life in a good creation, but there are problems when we forget that: Problems when we ignore our responsibilities or when we forget the limits to life as God intends it. There are problems when we forget just how good what we have is.

Adam and Eve, in today's story, come to see life no longer through God's eyes but through the serpent's eyes. We have to pay close attention to the way this story is told. See, it's first told through God's eyes. It's told from the perspective of what God intends. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." God created human life, so God gets to say what the purpose of human life is. The man is to care for this earth. He is given the ability and the freedom to do the activities necessary to maintain life and to use the gifts that God provides in creation, but he is to "keep" it. He is to care for it and so his freedom therefore isn't absolute. There are limits to it, which is symbolized by the fact that out of all the many trees in the world, there is one whose fruit the man is not to eat. And God says to him very plainly, "in the day that you eat of it you *shall* die."

See, at this point the story's told from God's point of view, spelling out God's intentions for human life, both the gifted nature of it, and it's responsibilities and limits. And in the section that is omitted from today's reading, where Eve is created, those intentions and responsibilities and giftedness are further spelled out in very simple terms. They are to be helpers of one another. Human life is a gift to be shared as partners and helpers of each other. It's spelled out, isn't it? But, then the focus shifts. The serpent shows up. He's just another creature in God's creation, one more "crafty" than the others, but just another creature. Nowhere in all the rest of the Hebrew scriptures is this serpent ever identified as Satan, or as the devil. No, it's more like he's a next door neighbor to Adam and Eve there in the garden and he shows up one day is chatting across the fence there with them.

And instead of focusing on the amazing variety of gifts and freedom God has given them in creation, he focuses on the one prohibition, the one limit. He says, "Was there any tree in the garden that God said you can't eat from?" And then, when they start to think about it, having already started to focus on the one limit rather than on the incredible gifts and freedom, the wheels are already turning for Adam and Eve, as to why they should ignore that limit. You see what they do? They distort the limitation placed by God so that it becomes easier to ignore!

Eve replies to the serpent's question, "well, God did say 'you shall not eat of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *nor shall you touch it*, or you shall die.'" God didn't say anything at all about not *touching* it! That's their distortion to try to make that limit seem more stringent and unfair than it is! It's part of their self-justification.

And then look, the serpent gives them an alternate view, a different way of understanding themselves and who God is than the way God had offered. He says to them, "No, no, this limit is not something for your own good. You won't die. It's just that God knows that if you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God in your knowledge of 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*...she took and ate"...they took and ate, she and Adam, since he was right there the whole time. When they *saw*, that is when they saw through a fellow creature's eyes, and not through God's eyes anymore, that it was a thing to be desired, then they desired it. That's just the way we.

I mean our freedom and ability to think and act on our own is certainly the way we were created, a gift from God. But, this story teaches us that it's only a gift when it's understood and used within God's intentions for life and creation. Trouble is, we don't like limits. We don't want God to be God and get to say what the intention and purpose of human life is. So, we decide that we can know and say what's good and what's evil for ourselves, independent of God. And here's the thing, having decided that we can make those judgments about life ourselves, we are left to get our desires not from God but from each other. Like Adam and Eve learned to desire the fruit of that one tree from the serpent.

I mean look, you remember, that's what the tenth commandment is all about. "You shall not covet ( now we've made that into some kind of "super" desire that just shows up every now and then, but the word is the same, it just means plain old ordinary desire.)..."You shall not covet (you shall not desire) your neighbor's house, you shall not desire your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." And this is not about stealing something that belongs to someone else. Stealing was covered in commandment number 8. It's just about desiring something someone else has.

I mean, what else do we do? We see our neighbor's really cool new car, and we think, I want one like that. We see a commercial for the new Macbook Air laptop computer, which we know someone else surely has and so it must be something that's desirable, and we think, "I want one of those." And, if I desire it, why shouldn't I have it? Do we ever stop to examine where our desires are coming from? We're being taught by fellow creatures what is desirable! That's what advertising is. Because we've decided we can make those judgments about what's good and what's evil, regardless of who God is, and what God's intentions for life are. And what happens when we no longer see creation and ourselves and our lives through God's eyes, but through each other's eyes?

Well, the next eight chapters of Genesis spell out what happens, beginning with Adam's attempt to blame Eve...on up through the story of Cain and Abel and then on to Noah. What happens is guilt, blame, rivalry, murder and disruption and confusion of the human community. Listen to this story, again. It is about who we are, us, right now, not about something that happened way back when. And it is about who God is in relation to us, right now. God gives us this wonderful life together in this amazing world, with responsibilities to care for each other and to care for the world, with what we need to do that, and with freedom to do the things necessary for life together.

But, there's more. Because, when we forget all of that, and go off deciding for ourselves what life should be all about, and ending up with only the desires we get from each other, God doesn't ever give up on us. You remember how this story goes? God had said very plainly to

them, “in the day that you eat of (that tree of thinking you know good and evil independent of God) you shall die.” But, of course, they don't. Even though that's what God's law would allow, even though that's what “justice” as we define it demands, (they broke a law for which the penalty was death) God instead lets them live. God gives them the gift of life a second time on the other side of the boundary!

Friends that is the definition of grace: God's willingness to be “unjust” in order to reclaim creation. Finally, that means God is “unjust” to herself. Because in Christ we know that finally all our guilt, blaming, rivalry, and murder that results from our claiming to know good and evil independent of God, end up putting God on a cross. God says in the cross, you can blame me, you can murder me and still I will love you, still I will not give up on my purposes for my creation.

So, as we enter this season of Lent where we try again to be honest about ourselves, we are given hope. The limits on human life are defined by Christ, who was human life's truest expression of freedom as God intends. He was free to love completely. And he showed us how our desires are to be bounded by God's desires for us and for our lives together on this earth. Finally, he showed us how to see ourselves again not through each other's eyes, but through God's eyes of love. That's the gift of resurrection, so that we can start over once again. I'm reminded of the lines from Don Henley's song “For My Wedding.”

He sings: “to want what I have, to take what I'm given with grace, these things I pray on my wedding day.”

To want (to desire) what I have.... to take what we've been *given* with grace...the grace to keep, to care, to serve and to help each other.

Make that your prayer.

Amen.