

Down into the Ditch

February 10, 2008

(Lent 1 - Year A)

Genesis 2: 25-17; 3:1-7

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

The story of Adam and Eve is one of the few stories in all of the Bible that most everyone seems to know.

The predicament of Adam and Eve and the serpent is the subject of countless jokes and cultural references and cartoons in the New Yorker magazine.

In the story, God puts Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and commands the man, saying:

“You can eat freely from every tree in the garden;
Except, you must never, ever, ever eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Then along comes the crafty serpent.

The woman fully understands God's commandment to not eat the forbidden fruit, but she is tempted.

“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” it.

When I was in elementary school, I walked to and from school every day.

I can't imagine, in today's society, ever letting a young child walk several blocks to school, all by themselves.

But it was different times in the early 1970s, and I was given the freedom to walk to school by myself.

In the mornings, I would leave our house and my mother would watch me walk down the street.

Then she should watch me as I would cross Plantation Drive, the busiest

street that I encountered in my walk to and from school.
Then, I was on my own to walk the rest of the way.
However, once I got to the end of Taylorcrest Street, there was a
drainage ditch that I had to cross in order to enter the schoolyard.
The drainage ditch had a small and narrow footbridge over it.
In the mind of a 7 year old boy, crossing the footbridge over the ditch
was the coolest part of walking to school.

As I would cross the footbridge, I would look down into the drainage
ditch, which actually looked more like a small creek.
In the ditch were raccoons and empty beer cans and abandoned shopping
carts and the occasional snake.

Now, my parents trusted me to walk to school all by myself, giving me
freedom and responsibility and independence.
However, my parents gave me only *one rule* which I was told never,
ever to break.
And the ultimate rule was this:
I was never, ever, ever to go down into the ditch.

One afternoon, on my way home from school, I began to cross the
footbridge.
I slowly looked over the railing of the footbridge at the grassy bank that
led down to the stream of water that was in the ditch.

A voice in my head said:
“I’m sure it wouldn’t hurt to see what it is like on the bank of the ditch,
just for a minute.”
Another voice in my head was the voice of my mom, saying:
“Jeff, never, ever, ever go down into the ditch.”

I thought for a moment, then I set my empty lunch box on the ground,
And I carefully walked down the inclined bank of the ditch, with my
heart pounding in my chest.
I went down the bank, just to the edge of the water.
I looked up, to see if anyone was watching me.
Then, I scampered back up the bank, picked up my lunch box, hurried

across the footbridge, then back to my house.

My mom, as usual, greeted me at the door.

She said:

“Jeff, you went down in the ditch, didn’t you?”

With my eyes as big as saucers, I began to stammer.

I lied and denied my sin.

I quickly looked at my corduroy pants to see if I had a tell-tale grass stains, but my pants were as clean as a whistle.

Eventually, I broke down and confessed.

And what I remember the most - almost 40 years later - was how amazed I was - and am - that mother knew exactly what I had done wrong.

And, even to this day, I cannot get my mom to spill the beans on how it was that she knew that I had eaten the forbidden fruit.

The story of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit is sometimes called The Story of the Fall.

However, I don’t think that it should be called The Story of the Fall.

I think it should be called The Story of Being Fully Human.

Because being fully human means that we are all tempted.

Being fully human means that we don’t like for someone to tell us what we cannot do.

Being fully human means that we are not God.

You see, God gives us freedom and responsibility and independence.

God lets us walk to school by ourselves.

God gives us an entire garden, an entire world to live in.

But all of us are fully human and we give in to temptation.

We put down our lunch box and go down into the ditch.

We listen to the serpent and eat that one fruit in the garden that we aren’t supposed to.

We are fully human - because we are not God.

The story of Adam and Eve means that we are fully human.
And the good news of Jesus Christ is that fully alive human beings are
not loved by God based upon our mistakes and our temptations.
Through the love of Jesus, God has adopted us as God's sons and God's
daughters, *in spite of* our sins and offenses.

As St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans:

“God proves his love for us in that while we were
still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹

In the 1700s, John Newton was a captain of a British slave ship that
transported African human beings in chains across the ocean to the
Americas.

In the year 1748, while he was in a ferocious storm in his slave ship,
John Newton had a huge conversion experience to Christianity,
jolting him into a realization of God's amazing grace and love.

John Newton is now famous because he wrote that great hymn that we
still sing today, the hymn “Amazing Grace.”

As John Newton approached his own death, he said this:

“My memory is nearly gone,
But I remember two things:
That I am a great sinner,
And that Christ is a great Saviour.”

In some respects, the good news of Jesus is quite simple:

We are fully human.
We eat the forbidden fruit.
We go down into the ditch.
We are great sinners.
But Jesus Christ is a great, great Savior.

During the season of Lent, we remember that we are red-blooded, fully-
alive human beings, just like Adam and Eve.

¹ Romans 5:8

During Lent, we remember our sins and temptations and mistakes, not so that we can beat ourselves up.

Rather, we remember our sins and temptations so that we can see how radical and amazing it is that God saves us and makes us his children.

For God loves us so much - that while we are still sinners, God stretches out his arms upon the hard wood of the Cross, for you and for me.

And the story of Adam and Eve tells me that I am fully human.

The story of Adam and Eve tells me

That I am a great, great sinner.

And that Jesus Christ is a great, great Savior.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2008