**Hunting for Fig Leaves**

* [Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent1_RCL.html#ot1)
* [Romans 5:12-19](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent1_RCL.html#nt1)
* [Matthew 4:1-11](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent1_RCL.html#gsp1)
* [Psalm 32](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent1_RCL.html#ps1)

My sister once said,” I think we must have come from somewhere very wonderful or we wouldn’t be so dissatisfied with what we have and filled with longing for something better.” Today we start Lent with part of the ancient Creation story. This narrative was developed by the ancient people as a way of explaining that longing that my sister voices, and explaining how things are. The ancient peoples saw that in the midst of a beautiful and amazing creation, humans were working hard for their sustenance, often alienated from God and violent towards one another. They explained that by saying that humans broke the rules and so were expelled from paradise. It is a foundational myth which shapes the way we understand the story of God and human, and so it is important that we see it clearly.

Over the centuries much focus has been given to Eve’s role. It was Eve who transgressed and then tempted Adam. This has been tied to the second creation story in which Eve was made from Adam’s rib and so was somehow lesser, and it has been used to support patriarchal ideas that women are second class citizens, or are wild temptresses who have to be kept in their place. But that is not the point of this story. Eve was created from Adam’s rib as a way to describe the closeness and intimacy that can be part of our life with one another.

Although this story clearly suggests that the first humans separated themselves from God by being disobedient, doesn’t it seem to you as though God may have set them up? He knew they were human. He knew that if you say you can eat anything except that one thing, that the average human is going to be tempted to try it. We don’t on the whole have great impulse control. If God really didn’t want us eating that fruit he could have put the tree somewhere else.

Now I’ve never had kids, but I’m pretty sure that many parents have a little bit of pride the first time that Johnny says “No.” It gets old very quickly, but we want our kids to think for themselves, we want them to be independent. They have to be able to say no in order to start to define who they are and who they are not.

Maybe Eve was acting out of that very human desire to know a little more, to test the limits, to explore the world around us. Maybe that first step of independence was exactly what God wanted to happen. Maybe the ancient people were a little bit off the mark when they were trying to imagine what might have happened because they didn’t consider God’s motivation.

So, how does it change things if God actually expected us to behave like humans – to take a risk, live dangerously, experiment?

It seems that God created humanity out of joy and for enjoyment. God wants our company in the cool of the evening – and first thing in the morning too. But she wants us to want it. If we can’t choose to hide out then our showing up is not exactly a prized moment.

God has given us inquisitive minds and free will. We can make choices. We can eat the fruit or drink the Kool-Aid. We can choose not to. We can have a relationship with God, or not. Without free will then we would have stayed in Paradise but we would never have developed a conscious, loving relationship with God. Just as a small child doesn’t really know where she stops and Mom begins. That’s wonderful for a while but is not something we want anyone to experience for the rest of their lives.

If we describe sin as separation from God, then eating that fruit was the first sin. It made the first people aware that they were separate… their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked. They realized that they were vulnerable and different from one another and from God. So they tried to hide their vulnerable parts behind fig leaves, and then they couldn’t stand up and admit to God what they had done.

Isn’t this the picture of us dealing with our individual sin? We try to ignore it or pretend that it doesn’t exist, and then we don’t want to mention it to God which is kinda silly since she knows anyway. But our attempt to hide or cover up takes us further away from God.

The idea that the first humans stole the knowledge of good and evil and that is what created sin, separation from God, is actually brilliant. It is very similar to the apostle Paul’s idea that sin is not reckoned when there is no law. If there are no rules then you cannot break them. If you have no consciousness then you live unconsciously just by instinct and impulse. The whole of the spiritual life is about developing Christ consciousness – moving from unconscious sin to conscious abundant life in Christ.

We get to move from unconsciously separating ourselves from God, to consciously joining ourselves with God.

And we see Jesus doing just that in the Gospel reading. Like Eve he is tempted. But these are different temptations. Eve was tempted to be human. Jesus is tempted to be super-human. He is tempted to do things his way, not God’s way.

In order to bring grace to humanity, in order to reconcile us to God even though we have been seeing God as a fearsome and angry deity who threw us out of Paradise and continues to punish us, in order to show us the unconditional and powerful love of God, Jesus had to take a particular path. Although he was God, the plan called for him to be fully human and to experience everyday life as a human. This was God’s will, this was Christ’s will. But then there was the human Jesus who was tempted just like us to take short cuts.

But he doesn’t go there. Jesus put his relationship with God and fulfilling his life’s work over the convenience of using super-human powers to get food, power and influence.

So we might frame the narrative differently from Paul. He said that sin came into the world through one man, Adam,’s disobedience and grace and life came into the world through one man, Jesus the Christ,’s obedience. We might say that consciousness came into the world through our grandmother Eve and Jesus shows us that we can be consciously re-united with God in a deeply loving relationship like his. Jesus shows us that God loves nothing better than for us to choose to walk with him in the cool of the evening.

Even though we ate the fruit. Perhaps because we ate the fruit.

God loves each one of us and is calling for us to use our freewill, our knowledge of good and evil, to turn from the ways that bring death and to the ways that bring life. To turn away from the choices which take us away from God and to make the ones that bring abundant life.

And the Holy Spirit works in our hearts so that we know what we need to do next. You know what you need to give up this Lent, and it probably isn’t chocolate. You know what the Spirit is asking you to do or to stop doing so that you can walk closer to God, so that when she calls you can stop hunting for fig leaves and say “Here I am.”

May God bless you abundantly this Lenten season.