

Jonathan Mark
FMC Reedley
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
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A Bite of Eternity

This morning I want to take you all on a journey of where I began with this text and where I am standing now.

Today's passage is what I like to call a snowball passage. Imagine a rock rolling down a snowy cliffside; with each turn, the rock collects more snow and grows to two or three times its original size. This text is like that; theologians have given Genesis 2 and 3 a lot of thought over the millennia. To be fair, these first chapters of Genesis are about the creation of the earth and humankind. These chapters are trying to answer some important questions, who are humans? Why are we here? What is our relationship with God?

Let's look at the outer layer of this passage, which, admittedly, I was clueless about growing up. Almost every theologian discusses this passage, so I'll focus on one. Augustine. The 4th-century shaper of Christianity. He viewed eating the fruit of knowledge of good and evil as a contagion. From Eve, we each got infected with this STI of sinfulness that made us unable to be good enough if we wanted to. Humans are born broken, and only God's grace can fix them. This idea is called original sin.

So, this turned me off of the garden story. Am I supposed to feel bad cause I'm a broken human? Or maybe since I'm a baptized Christian, ney an ordained minister, I should look down my nose at all those other non-Christian folks. But to be fair to Augustine, he points out that humans can be nasty to one another; some people choose what I perceive to be evil. Not only that, but people can get stuck in a rut of bad decision after bad decision. I've been there.

I want to share something that blew this passage open for me. On my second day of Old Testament class. September 2, 2016. The word sin does not appear in this passage. Instead, the original sin in the Bible is when God speaks to Cain, warning him against murdering his brother, "sin is lurking at the door, its desire is for you, but you must master it." There are consequences for Adam and Eve's decision. They are forced to farm and childbirth, though from where I am standing, this seems less like a punishment and more a description of the most difficult and important parts of pre-industrial civilization.

So if the garden story is not about sin? What is it about, then?

Living within limits (we're not God)

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will certainly die.” But the snake says, if you eat this fruit, you will become like the gods.

The garden of Eden is a mystical space where humans lived a charmed life. God provides them with fruit to eat, and all they need to do is serve and keep this land. God is a provider, but also has limits. Humans are supposed to be creatures, a part of creation. However, in our great pride, we act like gods. Humans have spread themselves out, taking up more and more space, leaving little room for the rest of creation. God is our provider, God has given us a great garden to live in, but the earth belongs to God.

Maturation:

“When the man and woman ate the fruit, their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked.”

When I was a child, I acted like a child. Kids do not come inbuilt with basic knowledge. I had to be told not to touch the hot stove. Not to eat raw cookie dough. When to go to bed. To clean my room, I still have not learned that lesson. Yet, the point is that no one is born with the gift of telling the difference between good and evil. I believe sometimes children must have room to make mistakes, ignore others, and touch that hot stove to learn the lesson. So this garden story is about Adam and Eve making a mistake, and God allowing them the free will to do it, then they face the consequences of their actions and learn.

So what does that mean for today? For one. This reminds me to stay away from shame. I’m not broken. No one is. Instead, everyone is on a journey of maturation. Some people have learned not to touch a hot stove; others are convinced the burning feeling strengthens them. And even if I have the wisdom of the stove, there is an endless expanse of knowledge I could not hope to grasp, and I am not God. We only get one bite of eternity.