

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 5  
Year B

Genesis 3:8-15  
Psalm 130  
2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1  
Mark 3:20-35

The story from Genesis is very familiar to us. It is commonly called the Temptation of Eve, although this is unfair to the woman God created to be the companion of the first man. It is noteworthy that neither of these two people is named until after this story. While the woman is tempted, is it fair to blame her for anything that happens?

In the second chapter of Genesis, we see God explaining some of the ground rules to the first man. In the middle of the chapter, God explains, "You may eat freely 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." It isn't until several verses later that the woman is created to be his partner. God is never recorded as telling the woman of this prohibition. It isn't until the serpent talks with her that she is made aware of any restriction we can see. Is it fair to blame someone who has never been told to avoid the fruit of one particular tree for all that happens to mankind after this?

The serpent is never equated with evil - it is only stated to be "more crafty than any other wild animal". When the woman relates that God had forbidden that they should not even touch the fruit of the tree, she may have been repeating what the man told her. Thus, who is to blame? There was no understanding of the concepts of good and evil until that point.

When they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, they hid. A couple of things come to mind - what did it sound like when God walked in the garden and, how can anyone hide from a God who can see everything? The one thing we do know is that man is not very good at hiding as he comes out when God calls. If he was truly afraid, one might think he would try to hide a little better.

One of my favorite thoughts about this story is what happens next - the first case of passing the buck - how can I deflect blame from myself onto anyone else. The man appears to blame both God and the woman, the woman blames the serpent, and the serpent becomes the fall guy for everything. The serpent gets blamed for doing one thing - telling the truth. Perhaps there is a lesson here for us. Before we start assessing blame, we need to know all of the facts.

But, there is a more important lesson to be learned from this story. The serpent tells the woman that, by eating this fruit, she will become like God. That desire is what has caused problems throughout history. People want to be like God - to decide who deserves to live or die, who gets to succeed in this world, who is to be favored in life. We have invented governments to enforce our ideas and history is scattered with the tragedies created by this desire. Even the Church is not exempt from trying to play God in this world. Wars have been fought, people have been displaced from their land - all because one group has decided that they get to be like God.

Scripture repeatedly tells us to humble ourselves before God. Jesus said that the meek would inherit the earth. Not the rich, not those who think they are the most powerful, but the meek and lowly. As one commentator has said, “sometimes there is quite a distance between what a document has to say and the church’s willingness or ability to hear it.” We might hear with our ears, but not with our hearts. Our relationship with God requires us to hear God’s Word with our hearts. Over the next few months, we will be looking at a book from the New Testament that is an exhortation so that we might understand the message God is trying to tell us. Chapter 2 begins with a message that flows all the way back to the Garden - “Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” The first man and woman drifted away from what God had told them. They added restrictions that God had not placed on them. Let us be faithful in our attention to what God is really saying to us today.