



March 1, 2020

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

The Adam Covenant

Lent is described as 40 Days, actually 40 Days plus the Sundays which are not counted because these are the Sabbath Day. On each of the Lenten Sunday's we are reminded of the First Covenants beginning here with Adam. Perhaps more than any text in literature, this narrative presents an overlap between the actual text and the layered meanings accrued over time. The temptation is to understand this as THE STORY OF SIN or Original Sin; however, the actual words reveal a surprise, the word SIN never appears.

Genesis describes how after creating with a word, the miraculous, interdependent complexity of the Cosmos, God intentionally created humanity, giving us 3 Gifts. That "Intent" is awesome, because other ancient cultures describe human beings as a by-product of creation, an accident, even a mistake by God. The Sioux peoples describe humanity being born of the armpit of Mother Nature, thereby causing her death. Genesis makes clear, God intended to create people. Following from Evolution we often see humanity as the highest form of creation; Biblically we choose to emphasize Genesis 1:26 that God created humanity to be have dominion over the earth, God's command being to be fruitful and multiply. But Genesis 2:15 emphasizes humans have a God-given purpose: We were not created for ourselves; we were created to work creation and care for it. In Hebrew, the word for dirt, for earth, for the primordial humus was Adama, so the creature God formed out of Creation to care for it is Adam; the earthling formed out of the Earth, the Human out of the Humus, as opposed to God the Grounded of the Ground.

God's first gift, was the gift of LIFE itself. A gift so sacred, so precious, we are to respect & treasure life. When a person's heart stops, or their breathing, their first word or the words of those who love them to those who resuscitated them is "Thank you for saving my life." So how much more do we need to Thank God for giving us the gift of life in the first place? I had the great privilege of my wife trusting me to deliver our firstborn, afterward, I remember beaming from ear to ear in elation. Having been present many times as people are handed over to God, the giving-over of that life is precious and holy as well.

God's second gift came directly from recognition of God's gift of life. God gave humanity the gift of MEANINGFUL WORK: God took the Adam, placing it in the Garden of Eden to work it and care for it. There is great anxiety when we retire from a career, of whether we will still have purpose; when we take off the uniform of a soldier, or of our vocation, who are we if no longer work? The great joy we have found here in Green Valley, is how each person has found meaningful work in the living of life. To be valued for what you contribute, for being part of life with others, of community makes all the difference.

God's third gift became the most problematic. God gave the gift of FREEDOM within LIMITS. "You are Free to eat from any tree in the garden; except, you must not eat of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will certainly die." That wording has always been curious to me.

God did not say "IF you eat from it" but "When," as if God understood from the beginning the dilemma we would have in desiring what we could not have. There is something about being told "Don't cross the street," "This far and no further," that limits inspire challenge to surpass. In one church, someone determined that we could make changes to the Administrative Offices and Classrooms, but not the Sanctuary or Fellowship Hall. They took Red Tape forming a line across the floor, up the walls and across the ceiling to cut-off the Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary from everything else. My goal in the first several months became to find a reason to cross that line. Here at Valley, I suppose the limit is that back wall. For those of us who are newer, it is a thing of legend, that previously this church was so strong and vital that the rear wall had to be opened into the Fellowship Hall to accommodate everyone. But it has been quite a while since that wall was closed. Watching numbers in the bulletin, they are only numbers, except I yearn for us to be strong and vital enough to demand crossing the limit: that wall to be open.

As the text shifts to Chapter 3, another wordplay occurs in Hebrew. The serpent was more "crafty" than any of the wild animals the Lord God made. The Hebrew word for crafty is 'arum which pairs with the original state of human beings: "nakedness" 'arumim, and in that original state they were not ashamed. The serpent asked "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" And notice that the first human to speak for God, the human who defends God, is the woman: Eve.

The serpent moved to take away the threat of limitation (You will not die), even making crossing the barrier something to be desired: as giving Wisdom. Eve's desire fueled her will to cross God's limit of our freedom. Then, when this first commandment was broken, Humanity's Original Desire for God became twisted: instead of Seeking our Creator, we Sought the stuff of Creation. The eyes of the two were opened, and their first "knowledge" was of the "shame" of their nakedness. They became distracted from their purpose of Caring For and Working Creation, by nakedness and hid themselves. Hiding yourself from God is the definition of Sin.

Theologically living in the paradox of unlimited freedom except for one thing, is the source of ANXIETY. We have been perpetually tempted to deny the limits of our knowledge, in order to maintain the illusion we are always in control. "ANXIETY IS LIVING IN A STATE OF PERPETUAL TEMPTATION." Anxiety is Not Sin, Anxiety is the PreCondition for Sin because there is always the possibility of faith, faith in the ultimate security of God's love that could overcome all our insecurities and fears. Making this paradox even greater is that Anxiety channeled can be the basis of human Creativity.

Humanity is Anxious because we see Life as limited and dependent, yet not so limited that we do not know there are limitations. We feel anxiety because we do not know the limits of our possibilities. We could Do Nothing and regard it as Perfectly Done, because higher possibilities are only revealed by each achievement, the Limits move. Therefore all human achievement has seemingly endless possibility.

The Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness according to Matthew illustrates Jesus' human temptation with anxieties, and his power of faith in God's love to overcome every temptation, every anxiety. After his Baptism, Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit back into the Wilderness to be tempted with his mission, his power, his own anxieties. What did it mean for this 30 year old son of a Single Mother, this Carpenter from Nazareth, that as he was Baptized, Heaven itself was ripped open, a Dove descended on him, and a Voice declared "You are my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."? What credibility did he have, what knowledge, what authority, that people would listen to what he said? Leaving being a Carpenter in Nazareth, how would he feed himself, his followers, the crowds? Was it up to him to feed the world? ANXIETY, Questions, Doubts are not Sin. Anxiety can be the basis of Creativity and Sin and Depression. In

Jesus' temptation we witness Jesus addressing his own anxiety, by utilizing the resources of faith.

How would he feed himself? Man does not live by Bread alone.

How would he demonstrate his authority and credibility? Not by selling his soul for all the kingdoms of the world.

Are you willing and able at this moment to risk your life to test whether God would save you?

Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.