

## Sermon

Pentecost 2, Year B

### **Reading:** Genesis 3:8-15

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you among all animals  
and among all wild creatures;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel."

## **Sermon:**

Christianity claims Jesus as its center, but it's all complicated.

St. Paul had a certain understanding about Jesus.

Peter and the others had different ideas.

After 2,000 years of chatter and endless disagreements,

In our world, there are around 2.5 billion Christians  
and 45,000 varied church groups.

The Christian world includes the Big Three:

Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant,  
plus countless Bible Churches.

St. Christopher's is part of the Episcopal Church,

which itself is part of the Anglican Communion,

which is 110 million Christians, all around the World. <sup>i</sup>

All Christians, in one or the other,

see the Bible as a source for Godly wisdom. And it is.

But, we read The Bible as if everything is plain. But it really isn't.

The Bible is actually really complex.

The Protestant Bible has 66 books:

39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New.

The Catholic Bible has 73 books: 43 in the OT and 27 in the NT.

There are dozens and dozens and dozens of  
Bible translations, into various languages.

Today, there are around 2.5 billion Christians.

Whatever Bible they prefer, most would, if asked,  
say that God speaks to us, through the Holy Bible.

*I think they're right.*<sup>ii</sup>

Even though today's Old Testament reading isn't  
one we think about very much, the background is familiar.

When Adam and Eve bit into the apple,  
they realized they were naked. And they had a problem!

While they were trying to figure out how to get out of trouble...  
God, suddenly showed up.

*"They heard the sound of the Lord ...walking in the garden".*

I remember back in the day, riding Big Jake in the High Sierras.  
We heard big cats roar, and we heard bears' snort.  
We heard birds sing and snakes rattle,  
The breeze in the trees and a squirrel's chatter.

I know those sounds, like I knew the heavy thud of my horse's feet.

*But I wonder what it's like to hear God walking among the trees?*

The Hebrew word that describes what Adam and Eve heard

Could describe "noise" or a "voice" or "thunder"....

I'm thinking of one particular, irritable judge, on a rant,  
or a politician under pressure, angrily shouting out.

God was a little irritated, with Adam and Eve, that's for sure.

In that noise, or voice or thunder God revealed to them,  
a very human sort of personality.

What did Adam and Eve hear? Thunder and a powerful voice?

It makes sense, to think so.

But the Bible says they heard,

The Lord walking through the Garden, *crunching leaves*.

*I wonder stopped to kicked a stone, or two, down the path?*

So, which God is the True God?

Is the True God in the Thunder?

Is the True God a pillar of fire in the night?

Is the True God a whisper?

Is God in the sound of a cool breeze?

Which God is the True God? *Will the real God please stand up!!!*

The message in today's Old Testament story  
is that God is complicated.

*And because we are made in his image, so are we!*

Today's story is about God<sup>iii</sup>, acting like any parent with a lost child.

I imagine God quietly looking about, in the Garden,  
eyes staring into the shadows,  
listening closely for the whisper of Her lost child.

Every parent can imagine the worry of a child lost.

We watch them with loving care.

We hold their hand when they cross the street.

It's as easy to imagine the terror of walking and listening,  
for any sign of your missing child,  
desperately crying out for her,  
as the day grows long and the time is short.

*And it's so much harder is when the child is hiding, from you,  
as children do.* <sup>iv</sup>

Where are you?" God asked,  
but the children were too afraid to answer.

Then, finally, one child answers and then she explains.

Or they both do. Or they try to.

And they explain. And they explain. And they explain.

And they point fingers.

“I was afraid,” “I was naked,” “I hid”.

But God is God. And God already had it figured out.

“Have you eaten from the tree...?”

*And Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent.*

God never mentions “Sin” in today’s reading.

Because that’s not the point.

Here’s the point of today OT story:

*“Be careful who you listen to”.<sup>v</sup>*

Today’s Gospel is just a snippet of the whole God story.

The Bible is big and complex.

But the story in the Garden is repeated every day.

As if we were still in the Garden,

people still point fingers at one another.

Again and again and again. Then Voila!!!

You’ve got 45,000 different spins on Christianity.

Eve and Adam lived in a simple, perfect world,  
according to the Bible.

They lived in a world of complete Goodness, and they had no clue.  
They were caught off guard. *That happens.*

When I got pickpocketed in Rome, I was so surprised....  
I was just a few seconds behind the curve.  
But that was enough.

Sometimes it takes more than once,  
when you're a little dense. *Like me.*

I got pickpocketed in San Francisco, too.  
But I learned. *Never again. Finally.*

Both times God bailed me out. And here I am today.  
The luckiest man in the world!

God bailed out Adam and Eve.  
And God sent Jesus. To bail out humanity, on the cross.  
At just the right time, and just the right place.

Jesus did the hardest thing, to save us from our sins,  
and to help us see the light.

*Jesus went to the Cross, so we could see the snake coming,  
And so we don't get fooled again. But we still do get fooled!*  
That's OK. Our God is a God of 2<sup>nd</sup> chances.

Next week, I am told, we will start repairing our water damage.  
The preschool comes first. It's taken a long time.

But through that extra time, God gave us a chance,  
to re-think a few things. God gave us a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance.  
God gave me, and gave Adam and Eve, a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance.  
A new life. A new way of being Church. A rebirth.

How can we use this 2<sup>nd</sup> chance to bring new life,  
to our fifty-year-old church?

How can we use this 2<sup>nd</sup> chance to make our Church easier  
for older folks, and for folks with mobility challenges?

How can we use this 2<sup>nd</sup> chance to make our Church  
more inviting to families, and to singles and to young couples?

How can we use this 2<sup>nd</sup> chance -- our land and our buildings –  
to better serve God’s Kingdom, to build a new garden  
and to invite the world into our home?

Ask yourself those questions. Then give me a call.

-AMEN

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<sup>i</sup> I am an Episcopal priest because God called me. Took a long time! God is a pest! But each of us is here because God called each of us to this place... Right here. Right now.

<sup>ii</sup> The history of the Bible's development as one book – if it is one book- is extraordinarily complex.

Our English version is based on the printed edition of the Hebrew Bible, as well as ancient Hebrew and Greek translations, themselves based on ancient manuscripts. Ironically, many of the most important manuscripts are from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, almost a thousand years after the Biblical canon was set. The Dead Sea scrolls brought to light much more ancient material, going back to (roughly) Jesus' time. These themselves are copies of texts, or of stories transmitted into ancient writings, 500-600 years before Jesus.

The oldest Greek manuscripts go to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century after Christ while some are newer, going back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Many are written only in Greek capital letters, for reasons I do not know. The Greek does vary from the Hebrew, on some occasions. For example, the books of Jacob and of Jeremiah are much shorter in the Greek, as is the Story of David and Goliath, in 1 Samuel 16-18. As such most academics would agree, I think, that talk about Biblical Inerrancy is not sensible. Many of those who urge inerrancy, will say that the Bible is inerrant in the original manuscripts, none of which are known to exist, and if we found older material how would we know it was an "original"?

Still the Dead Sea Scrolls have revealed a stunning continuity, over time and over many generations. That continuity, I think, reveals to us the Hand of God in preserving these materials, which taken as a whole, we call The Holy Bible. See, [Introduction to the Hebrew Bible](#), Collins, John, J. (Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004).

Today's reading is often called the Yahwist narrative, because of its emphasis on God, i.e., Yahweh. It seems to be blended with other narratives, from multiple traditions. Some people suggest that the snake justifies the Israelite rejection of the Canaanite goddess Asherah, a fertility goddess, whose image was a snake in a tree.

<sup>iii</sup> Importantly, in Genesis Chapter 1 the noun for God (or Gods) is El or Elohim (אלהים), which is the generic Hebrew word for "God" or "Gods", whether the God of Israel or the god/s of any other people. In Gen. 2, however, the reference is changed to YHWH Elohim, i.e., "God YHWH", which means "I Am (what I am)." . See, *inter alia*, [https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/ask\\_a\\_scholar\\_what\\_does\\_yhwh\\_elohim\\_mean](https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/ask_a_scholar_what_does_yhwh_elohim_mean)

<sup>iv</sup> Genesis 3:8b

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<sup>v</sup>Adam blamed, Eve. Eve blamed the snake. And God said, “OK”. Then He cursed the snake. God doesn’t in this, the second Genesis creation story, either condemn the snake or call it “Satan”.