

Pastor Roy's Sermon from March 5, 2017 (Lent)

The first chapters of Genesis mingle stories which reveal Israel's world of faith in God. They ask, "Who are we and where did we come from? How are we different from our neighbors with their tribal gods and customs?" In these stories, the sun and moon are not gods, they are part of creation. They are the lights in the sky. Simple stories expressing profound wisdom and identity for Israel and the Jews in exile. If you read it with fresh eyes, these stories are much less about revealing precisely what happened in the beginning and more about exploring the relationship between God, humanity, and the rest of creation. They are stories of faith which invite us to faith.

Consider the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Imagine a paradise in which there is great faith and trust in the abundance of God and creation. Even in that paradise there is the temptation of greed, fear, and desire which threaten grace and wellness. Imagine a way of being in which everyone receives everything as a gift from the hand of God. Imagine being free from decisions about right and wrong, how much is enough to use, what to share, what to save—imagine boundless energy to live in love.

Paul picks up the conversation reminding us that sin is passed from generation to generation, from person to person. Grace is also passed from generation to generation and person to person. Adam is the human nature of sin. Our preference for short term gains over long term benefits. Jesus Christ is healing and mercy in faith. Righteousness, justification, and obedience describe Christ's life of faith. We look to Christ and we are filled with hope. Adam gives a curse. Christ gives a gift. Jesus' gift is stronger than Adam's. But we learn the curse and gift from one another. Generation to generation.

The power of Christ's love overcomes the curse of sin, and fear, and greed. But we need each other to see and feel what love is, what grace is. The sin passes along easily enough, and we struggle against it. But so does the love which we are free to embrace and share.

Sin brings misery. When fear and insecurity determine our actions we feel guilt and anxiety because we are out of balance with the rest of creation. Mercy fills us with life and peace. It takes eyes of faith to practice so that we can be truly free and filled with God's mercy.

Jesus had the same temptations as the rest of us. 1-Prove yourself. Get some benefit from your faith. Satisfy your hunger. Take care of yourself first. But Jesus says, "No, this isn't about me and my hunger. There are more important things than me and my hunger."

2-Then he is tempted to prove himself to the religious world. "Really make a difference! Go to Jerusalem and show your stuff! They'll be impressed if you float down from the temple carried by angels." Jesus says, "No, faith is not about impressing the temple crowds."

Finally, Jesus is tempted to give in to the anxious thoughts and fears that he must change or control the world, whatever it takes. His response to the temptation is, "The only necessary thing is to worship and serve God. No need to succeed. No need to conquer or control. Simply be faithful."

According to Matthew, the angels do not arrive to prove anything about Jesus but to support him in his faithfulness and resistance of temptation.

Coming back around to St. Paul, Jesus's example and gift of love increase our faith to follow in the way of love rather than to give in to fear and insecurity. Faith is choosing love when our instincts tell us otherwise. Faith is to love and serve the Lord without fear of failure, or the need to get it right every time. This Lent, let us choose to love and serve the Lord. And keep loving and serving even when we fall short. Thanks be to God.