

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
Dan Krebill, co-pastor

March 10, 2019  
*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent*  
Genesis 1:27; 3:1-7 & Luke 4:1-13

### **The Look of Lenten Love**

In spite of the fact that Daylight Saving Time began early this morning, you would never know by looking out the window that spring is on the way. With a colder and snowier February than most, that has lingered well into this month, this March feels more like the dead of winter rather than the tail end of it. It's really only the longer days and shorter nights that have given us any indication of the coming change of season.

In the church, one of the seasonal change signs for us is when we enter into the period known as Lent. Lent, by the way, is a word that means spring. Lent is a moveable church season because of it's being anchored to Easter Sunday, which moves around from year to year based on, believe it or not, the movements of the sun and moon. And it just so happens that this year's April 21<sup>st</sup> Easter is almost as late as it ever is. April 25<sup>th</sup>, by the way is the latest possible date for Easter, and March 22<sup>nd</sup> is the earliest possible Easter date. If you want to know how the date of Easter is calculated, ask me after the service.

Again, though, you'd never know by the outside environment, that we're in a later-than-usual season for Lent and Easter.

Perhaps it's fortuitous that our late Easter and our late winter are coinciding this year, so that it might just start to feel like spring when we get to Easter Sunday, 6 weeks from today.

Even though we talk about Jesus throughout the year, starting with his birth at Christmas, after which we look more closely at his life and teaching and preaching, it's this time of year when we focus more specifically on the significance of Jesus for us as Christians. The 6 weeks of Lent, leading up to Easter, is a time to ponder and reflect on the unique role that Jesus has in the life of faith—the Christian faith that is.

This morning, in addition to the psalm, we read one passage of scripture from the Hebrew Bible—that is the Old Testament—and one passage of scripture from the New Testament. The passage from Luke's gospel is the account of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. This is the passage that is traditionally read on this first Sunday in Lent. I'll talk about that in a few minutes, but I want to begin by talking a bit about the passage we read from the book of Genesis.

Being the first book in the Bible, the early chapters of this book set the stage for all that will follow in both the Old and New Testaments. In fact, the first 11 chapters of Genesis can be categorized as what is called prehistorical literature. What this means is that the stories and accounts within it don't depend on historical anchors or touch points in order to convey the truth they contain. They are stories that seek to establish some baseline understandings of the world from which the rest of the Bible emerges.

The 2 creation stories, in chapters 1 and 2, establish that God is the source of everything in the heavens and on the earth. The stories that follow it seek to explain how it is that sin and separation from God became normative for the human race. The stories of Cain and Abel, the tower of Babel, and of Noah and the Ark, all underscore this reality of human sinfulness and its consequences, in contrast to God's loving forgiveness.

Again there is virtually nothing to grab onto in these stories that would tie them to the history of the world that we know it from an astronomical, geological, archaeological or biological standpoint. That being the case in no way diminishes their theological and spiritual importance to us as people of faith. In fact, I'd argue that getting tied up in the historicity of these prehistorical stories is actually a meaningless distraction that can obscure the truth that they have to convey from the standpoint of faith.

The story of the people of God begins to have historical anchors in Genesis chapter 12 with the story of God's call of Abram and Sarai, who in the course of the story become Abraham and Sarah who are considered to be the father and mother of the Hebrew people, chosen by God to be in special relationship with God. While the Bible continues to be a collection of stories and poetry from here on out, what's most important about them is that they testify to God's love.

So let's take a look at the truth conveyed in the first part of Genesis chapter 3 that we just read. If you were reading along in the pew Bibles, you perhaps noticed the heading for this chapter: "The First Sin and Its Punishment." This is the story of that scurrilous serpent who interacts with one of the two newly created human beings whom God has placed in what was called the Garden of Eden. This the story where Adam and Eve, the first 2 human beings, succumb to temptation and as a result fall from grace and into the state of sin—the same state in which humans have found themselves from the beginning of time. Another name for this story is the account of the Fall from Grace or Paradise, sometimes referenced simply as The Fall.

It's important to clarify what is meant by living in a state of sin. Because it really sounds awful doesn't it? And while it is ultimately awful, it shouldn't lead us to beat up on ourselves and others. What it really describes is the reality of our inescapable mortality—that we will, each one of us, die someday. This is a fundamental defining characteristic of our human existence that is quite in contrast to the God of the universe who is immortal. God is immortal, who will never die. We are not.

This is the story of how the first humans succumbed to temptation. Because it is a story of temptation—the first story of temptation—it has direct relationship to another story of temptation that took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, of which we just read in Luke's gospel. In this first story of temptation in the life of Jesus, we see that, in contrast to those in the Genesis story, Jesus does not succumb to the temptation set before him. It is no coincidence that there are parallels in the Genesis account for each of the three temptations that Jesus resisted. Those of Jewish ancestry as well as those who knew the origin stories of the Jews, would have found this beginning to the story of Jesus to be incredibly compelling.

The first temptation that is set before Jesus is to turn stones into bread to satisfy his acute hunger at the end of his 40-day fast in the wilderness. The contrast to the Genesis story is striking. Jesus is led by the spirit into the stark wilderness devoid of food and water, whereas Adam and Eve are placed by the creator God in a lush verdant garden where all of their needs are met, with abundant food to eat from all plants except one—the tree in the center of the garden. Jesus is tempted to eat when he is there to fast and does not give in. Adam and Eve who have all the food they could possibly eat are tempted to eat of the fruit of the one forbidden tree, and give in and succumb.

The second temptation that is presented to Jesus also has its parallel in the Garden of Eden. When Jesus is shown all the kingdoms of the world and is told that they will all be his if he falls down and worships the devil, he too resists for he knows this is not the time for that. The temptation is for Jesus to claim this lordship of the world prematurely, for through the power of the resurrection, Jesus

shall indeed reign where'er the sun, as the great hymn puts it. This is again in stark contrast to the temptation that is set before Adam and Eve, and to which they do succumb, when they're told that they will not die if they eat of the forbidden fruit, but rather will be able to see as God sees, to be like God.

Jesus is then tempted a third time to use the powers that are within him to visibly demonstrate that divine power by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple so that God's angels will rescue and save him from harm. Since there is no one purported to be in the wilderness with Jesus, the show of power is being called for as much for Jesus to prove it to himself as anyone that he has this divine power. But Jesus does not give in to such temptation. Adam and Eve, on the other hand eat the forbidden fruit so that they can experience and prove to themselves that they can be like God.

What is most tragic about the giving in by Adam and Eve is that they had already been created by our loving God with the imprint, the image of God, when they were created. This is perhaps one of the most powerful verses in all this first 11 chapters in Genesis. That ". . . God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Gen. 1:27)

Historian and theologian Justo González summarizes this understanding of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness prior to his public ministry as the inauguration of Jesus rectifying that which had gone awry from the get go at the outset of humanity and what will come in the work of Jesus. He writes, "This temptation foreshadows what will happen at the cross, when the leaders of Israel will mock Jesus, saying: 'Let him save himself if he is the Messiah' (Lk. 23:35), and the soldiers of Rome would echo the same sentiment: 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' (Lk. 23:37)" (*Luke: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, © 2010, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 62)

González concludes by writing, "Luke says that after the temptations in the wilderness the devil left Jesus 'until an opportune time.' In a sense, the most opportune time, which repeated the temptations of the wilderness, was the cross. But in this case too Jesus was able to resist and defeat the powers of temptation." (*ibid.*)

My friends, this is the look of Lenten love. God's tireless pursuit of reconciliation with the human community is made complete in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, God's only son given for us. This season of Lent, over the next six weeks, is a gift to us as we consider the full breadth and depth of God's love for the world and its people. That's you and me, all of us.

I invite you into this Lenten season with the challenge to see God's hand, and thereby see God's love, poured out for us