

Insignificant
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Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ 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.'

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴ But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' "

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' "

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' "

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

As we began Lent this past Wednesday, I talked about the themes of being raised and being transformed and being met by God where we are, themes which seem to weave their way through the readings of the season. And I spoke of how, whatever we do to one another that pushes down, God can and will lift back up. In every case we start somewhere. There needs to be somewhere from which people are raised, some starting point from which someone is transformed, some place to be met.

In our story from Genesis, we find the first “somewhere.” In this case, whatever we do to **ourselves** that pushes down, God can and will lift back up. We pray each week that God will deliver us from evil; not that God will prevent us from being tempted but that God will deliver us through the temptations we face. Jesus in our reading from Matthew leaned on God and resisted. Jesus came out of fasting, followed by temptation presented at his utter weakest, and was still able to hold fast to God, sealing his resistance to the tempter with these words: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

Adam and Eve were tempted. In the moment, rather than lean on trust in God, Eve not only turned away from God but grew the chasm by embellishing God’s command in order to paint God not in loving terms but in controlling terms. Just after we are told that God said to Adam and Eve, “You may freely eat 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,” the serpent asks, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden?’” Eve replies “God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *nor shall you touch it*, or you shall die.’” Right then, we knew she was going to eat from it, didn’t we? She set it up so the serpent could convince them eating from the tree wasn’t as bad as she made it out to be. And so they ate, and this is their starting point, their somewhere. Those who were elevated from the earth took a step back toward it in that moment.

On Wednesday, I said “We receive ashes, we handle the dirt from which we came, as our reminder that whatever we do to one another that pushes down, God can and will lift

back up, ourselves included.” I invited those came to receive ashes that day to then head here near the pulpit to take a handful of dirt and use it to fill the seed starting trays. God transformed us from piles of dirt and dust into these whooshing, pounding, fluttering bodies, each and every one of us. In the tradition in which I was raised, I was taught to be disdainful of Adam and Eve for ruining the good thing we had going with God, for bringing original sin upon us all. I was taught that because of their choices we all suffered. That early teaching set an attentiveness to making sure I didn’t ruin it for others (while I was a goody-two-shoes in school, I was **never** the person who reminded a teacher that he or she had yet to assign us homework). Being the first-born “you-should-have-known-better” kid only added to that. It also set an attentiveness to all those who **did** make it worse for the rest of us, and ingrained a related scorn. After all, we had Jesus for an example - why couldn’t they just live like we learned in Matthew?

With age, and my own spiritual growth, I have come to understand it is not my responsibility or privilege to monitor how others struggle with living into how God created them to be. I have a lifetime’s worth of work here in my own life to which I can pay attention, including the work of crushing that lens I use for seeing and judging others, of stomping on it and grinding it into fine pieces until it is unsalvageable. I admit that when it’s most difficult to welcome inward scrutiny, I find myself searching for fragments of that lens so I turn scrutiny back outward on others again. I’m not proud of that but knowing it lets me identify that behavior for what it is, rather than delude myself that I am just being the defender of all that is right in the world.

I cannot undo my previous reducing or judging or diminishing of others but I have a better chance now of refraining from it than I once did. Now when I hear of Eve and Adam, I view them with more tenderness. I recognize that I only have a tiny slice of the story of what made them so susceptible to the luring of temptation personified in the serpent. I count them among those I must offer to God as ones I have pushed down, and my faith raises in me the desire to add my heartfelt plea for God to raise them up from my pushing down, supporting the work in which God is already engaged on their behalf.

This Lenten season as we learn about those whom Jesus has raised, whom God has transformed, whom Jesus has met, we'll watch for such raising with our own eyes. The soil has been prepared. Today, I invite you to come forward after the service to push down one last time those for whom you plead to God to raise and transform. Whether it be someone upon whom you have looked down or someone looked down upon in your family, your friends, your community, this nation, or this world, even yourself, I invite you take seeds for those people and gently push them into the soil in the trays to my right. Where you have planted them, gently pat down the soil so others can know seeds have been planted in that place. As we watch God raise them to new life in this Lenten season, you might consider offering prayers for them as they grow and transform. Lord, in your mercy, hear these our prayers.