

Human Nature

Genesis 3:1-21

The First Sunday in Lent, March 13, 2011

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Why did Eve even talk to the serpent? If only she had not spoken with the serpent! It was like a porn addict saying that he can go online unsupervised and not have any problems. It is like a recovering alcoholic saying that he can go into a bar and not have any problems. Here she is a human being subject to temptation and she is talking to the tempter! Has she sinned by talking to the tempter? No, but things sure would have gone a lot better if she had not spoken with the tempter at all. In engaging in temptation do you sin? No, but things will sure be better if don't talk to the tempter at all. No one is fooling anybody. When you talk to the tempter you want to sin. If you didn't want to sin, you wouldn't have bothered to have spoken to the tempter at all.

Nevertheless, Eve engages the conversation. The tempter takes the opening line. He always does. Did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

It sounds like the tempter is engaging in casual conversation. It sounds like he is asking for information. I don't understand what God told you. What did He tell you? Did He say that you couldn't eat fruit from any of these trees?

The tempter seems innocent, but He has already hinted to the woman that God is holding back on her. Without saying it explicitly the tempter has put the thought in her head, God is holding back on me. Even though she corrects the tempter later on, the thought is still there. God is holding back on me. There are things that He has not given to me.

The tempter has also questioned the word of God. The tempter will always question the Word of God. Did God really say that you must not eat the fruit from any tree in the garden? Did God really say, "Let there be light?" Did God really say, "Your sins are forgiven?" Did God really say, "This is My Body. This is My blood"? Did God really say all of that? Or on the law side of things, Did God really say not to commit adultery? Did God really say not to bear false witness against your neighbor? Did God really not make any exceptions to that whatsoever? Did God really say that you shall not have any other gods?

It raises the possibility for Eve: what if God did not say it. After all she did not hear the commandment. We assume that Adam told her the commandment. What if Adam got it wrong? What if Adam misinformed her? They might be missing out on a golden opportunity if only we can get straight what it was that God said.

Eve now has every reason to discontinue this conversation. She has every reason to stop talking and to stop listening. Anyone who moves her to question the word of God that she received from her husband is someone to whom she should not listen. But she thinks that she can correct the tempter.

Is thinking that a person can correct the tempter a sin already? Is it not the height of pride itself to actually think that you can outsmart the tempter, to actually believe that you a mere human being can outsmart the greatest of the beings next to God? It is best simply to go with the clear word of God and forget about the tempter's subtleties. But Eve thinks she can correct him, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden God has said, 'You will not eat from it nor shall you touch it let you die.'" We might quibble with Eve on the details, but she has the essentials correct.

"You will not surely die," the tempter flatly states. He flatly contradicts the Almighty. What is amazing is that to you and I who know the end of the story the tempter is right. Adam and Eve did not keel over dead upon eating from the forbidden fruit. The tempter uses that to raise the question in our minds, "Well will we die when we eat of forbidden fruit?" God said Adam and Eve would but they didn't. Maybe we can eat of forbidden fruit and not die either.

This is how you recognize the tempter. At some point he will flatly contradict God. You can never tell when it will happen. You can never tell what subject he will pick upon which to dispute with the Almighty, but the tempter will eventually dispute with the Almighty. The tempter is not content to dance around the edges of temptation, he wants you to sin.

He did this with our Lord when he requested that Jesus worship him. At some point the Word of God is flatly denied. At some point the tempter will move from, "Did God really say?" to "God did not say!" The tempter will claim that God did not say, "Let there be light." And while we are at it, he will say that God did not say, "Let us make man in our image and in our likeness." He will go on, "God did not say, 'This is My body. This is my blood.' God did not say, 'Your sins are forgiven.' God did not say, 'This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.' God did not say, 'He is not here. He has risen just as He said.'"

Notice that Satan does not begin with these large theological truths. He does not deny that God created Eve. He does not dispute that she is made in God's image. He starts with something rather innocuous really. You will not surely die.

What kind of God would threaten to kill His children? What kind of God would impose such a penalty on an act like eating the fruit of a tree? What is so wrong with eating the fruit of a tree? After all you are not oppressing the poor when you eat of it. You are not murdering when you eat of it. You are not committing adultery when you eat of it. You are not betraying your neighbor. It is only eating after all! What kind of God would make a fruit tree forbidden on the pain of death?

And that is how Satan works. He will pick something. The tempter will select some innocuous part of Scripture and he will start with that. Oh Jonah and the great fish is a parable. It didn't really happen. Can you get away with that and still believe in Jesus? Sure you can. So let's get away with it. Think of the trouble it will save us Christians if we just take that little part of Scripture and make it a parable. We might even get more people to believe in Jesus if we don't have to defend this rather embarrassing part of the Bible that actually claims that Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights and survived. Don't we really want to listen to the point of Jonah's book and the point of Jonah's book is about God's mercy. We can still hear the point of Jonah's book and believe its message about God's mercy without having to go through this embarrassing procedure of trying to believe that Jonah was in the great fish for three days and survived.

Well, then that makes us feel better and pretty soon we are doing the same thing to a different part of the Scripture. Well maybe those six days of creation are really millions of years. If we believe that then we don't have to go through this embarrassing procedure of trying to convince people to believe in that in order to believe in Jesus. Can't you believe in Jesus without believing in the literal six day creation? Sure you can. Even conservative theologians will tell you, but that is how Satan works. He takes this little thing and questions that and that little thing and questions it. Pretty soon you are messing with the big stuff. After all if God cannot keep a man alive in the belly of a great fish for three days and if God cannot create the universe in six days, then how could He raise Jesus from the dead? Maybe if we just explain away the resurrection of our Lord and don't require people to believe that because it is just too fantastic, maybe more people would believe in Jesus. We could get more people to believe in Jesus if we just didn't talk about this whole rising from the dead thing at all. Think how many more people we could get in our churches if we just got rid of that.

And then suddenly without really realizing it you have nothing at all. You have no Jesus, none that will save you from the grave at any rate. You have nothing to offer people that they don't already have because they already believe in evolution and Jonah is a myth assuming that they even know who the guy is and Jesus is just a nice man who got killed under bad politics. They know all of that without church so why would they go to on just to hear what they already know.

And then there is no salvation for either or them and on that day you have surely died.

That is the tempter. That is how he works. He may start out real subtle, but he does not stay there. He may start with something small, but he is going for something big. He may start with a tree and its fruit, but his goal is to get Adam and Eve to worship themselves. He may start with turning stones into bread, but in the end he wants you to worship him.

The tempter adds, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will know good and evil. You will be like God." It is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil after all. And God has been holding out on you some more. He has the knowledge of good and evil, but He is forbidding you from having it. And don't you want to be like God?

Don't you want to be like God? Isn't right that we are like God? Doesn't God want us to be like Him? All of these are fine sentiments, but they are hiding what we are really thinking. We want to be God! Never mind being like Him, we want to be Him. We want the power, the glory, the authority, the notoriety. We want all of those things! We don't want Him bossing us around. We don't want Him telling us what we can and cannot do! We want to be able to do anything that we want. We want to do what we think is good and we want to be able to condemn others when we think they are doing evil! We want to be the judge of our neighbor and the judge of our own activities. We want to be exempt from someone else's judgment. We want to do as we please and not have any other obligation laid upon us. We want to be God. We want the knowledge of good and evil.

Little suspecting that to be God is to be able to support all life and we are not able to do that, we have eaten the forbidden fruit. We have the knowledge of good and evil. We can now judge our neighbors. We can now do as we please. We can now decide right and wrong for ourselves. We can judge our own actions and the actions of others.

And here comes God walking in the cool of the day. In our enthusiasm for knowing good and evil and being like God we never once considered what He might think about all of this. We hear His sound. We are terrified. We hide from the face of God. We don't want to see His face. What if He is mad at us?

And God calls to us, "Where are you?" A most profound question: Where are you? Even more profound when God is asking it: Where are you in relationship to Me?

I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid. "Who told you that you were naked?" God already knows that they have been talking to someone. "Have you eaten from the fruit of the tree about which I told you not to eat?"

You see people there it is. That is the most damning thing that God says in this whole thing. It is not that they ate the fruit of some tree even if it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is that they did not do what God told them to do. Was it such a hard thing? Was it so hard not to eat of the fruit of the tree? Was God asking them for some impossible thing? In fact God was not asking them to do anything at all! He was asking them not to do anything. If they had been lazy couch potatoes they could have kept this commandment! The problem is not that they did nothing. That would have been better. The problem is that they did something and they messed it all up.

We have this same problem. Is it so hard and burdensome for women to dress modestly? Is that such a burdensome thing to ask? Is it so hard to live in sexual purity?

And it would have been a whole lot easier to answer the question if God had left the last part off. If He had simply said, "Have you eaten of the fruit of the tree?" it would have been easy to have said, "Yes." We admit to our sins all of the time. What is difficult to answer is, "Have you eaten of the fruit of the tree about which I told you not to eat?" He told us not to eat of it. To tell God that we ate of it is to tell God that we did not listen to Him. It is to tell God that He does not matter and that we matter most. It is to tell God that we cannot hear, we cannot listen to other people. It is to tell God that the only thing that we care about is ourselves. We don't care about Him. We don't care about His Word. Even when it tells us to do something so simple we will go and not do it because He doesn't count in our eyes. He doesn't matter. Only we matter.

God comes at us and He is a Father. You can say all of the philosophical things that you want to about God, but when the rubber hits the road, He is ultimately our Father. "Did you break the lamp? Were you running in the house when I told you not to run?" Did you eat the fruit of the tree about which I told you not to eat? The answer is simply, "Yes," but we cannot say that. We want to hang on to our little notion that we are god and that god is not. That means that we cannot bear to admit to Him that we have lived as if He did not matter and as if only we mattered.

And so we blame someone else. "The woman that You gave to me. She gave me from the tree and I ate." It's her fault! We blame women. We blame God! Imagine the gall of Adam! It is not just the woman who got me to disobey God, it is God who got me to disobey God. If you had not given me this woman in the first place, I wouldn't be this disobedient child that stands before You.

And we blame God. It is God's fault that I hate Him. He let my son die. It is God's fault that I hate Him, He let my father die. It is God's fault that I hate Him and we can list a hundred things that have gone wrong in our lives that are beyond our control. If God had not put that tree in the garden to start with, then we wouldn't be in this mess. We even dress it up in theological terms trying to deny the reality that is right in front of us. It's His fault that we sin. God is unjust when He creates sinners and then punishes them. God forbid that we take responsibility for it.

The woman is more classic, "The Devil made me do it." She may say it in a different way than the man, but she is not different in kind. It is always someone else's fault to us human beings. I have often wondered how things would have turned out had Adam and Eve simply admitted to God what they had done. How would things have turned out if they had simply told God what they did? You see they did not trust God. Every time you withhold your sins and will not confess them, you are telling God that you do not believe in Him. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is the forgiver of sins. If He is the forgiver of sins you have nothing to fear in confessing to Him. He will forgive you. But to fear confessing one's sins is to admit that you do not believe that God will forgive you. You don't believe in Jesus.

And that is the most hellish part of sin and the most hellish part of being one's own God. To be one's own God is to believe that God is like you. You wouldn't forgive you of the things that you have done so why should He? But He will.

Look how things wind up for Adam and Eve. They are not cursed though they surely deserve it. The ground is cursed. The serpent is cursed, but human beings are not cursed. God makes coverings for them. He provides for them. They have not admitted anything. They have not confessed anything and there is God providing for their needs. He will forgive you. That is His attitude toward you. He will forgive anything. If He will forgive you ignoring Him and treating Him as if He did not matter and as if only you mattered, then He will forgive anything.

This is our human nature. For now it is a cursed nature. We have to toil in order to obtain our daily bread. We give birth to children with great pain. Husbands now rule over their wives and try to get them to submit. The earth produces thorns and thistles. We die.

We are also terrible at holding conversation. We cannot hold conversation with the tempter without messing all kinds of things up. We cannot hold conversation with God without making things worse. Why don't we let Jesus handle our communications? Let us have Jesus talk to the tempter. He does a much better job of handling the tempter than we do. Why not let Jesus handle our communication with God the Father? Let Jesus intercede on our behalf. Jesus does a much better job of handling our communication with God. When He is doing the talking, things turn out much better.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.