

Humanity Rebels, God Responds

(Genesis 3:1-13, 22-24; Romans 5:8-19; John 8:3-11)

The story of Adam and Eve is one of the world's best known stories. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. It was THE perfect place--that place we're always seeking for ourselves--Shangri La--the Fountain of Youth--heaven on earth--paradise--THE idyllic place--nirvana--God's in his heaven and all's right in the world. There was only one catch: "the Lord God commanded...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" (Genesis 2:16-17). All Adam and Eve had to do to continue living in that wonderful, peaceful place was to obey God. But they couldn't do it. Adam and Eve both succumbed to evil temptation and disobeyed God. They ate of the forbidden fruit. And, naturally, as a result of their disobedience, their rebelling against him, God responded. God kicked them out of the Garden of Eden.

Now, back in college, when I was working on the Columbia, Missouri, newspaper, we were told that all stories should answer certain key questions: when; who; what; where; why; and how.

So, **when** did today's story happen? On the surface, the story appears to have happened a long, long time ago, shortly after creation, the beginning of time, but really, the story didn't just happen that one time. It's an ancient story, true; but it's also a modern story as modern as today.

And, **who** is the story about? On the surface, it's about a man named Adam and a woman named Eve. But the name "adam" is the Hebrew word for "humanity," and the name "Eve" is usually translated "life" or "mother of all who live." So the story of Adam and Eve is really the story of humanity and life. It's the story of the lives of all of us, of each one of us, you and me. We're the main characters in today's story.

Now, **what's** the story about? On the surface, it's about a man and a woman disobeying a commandment from God. But, of course, what the story is really about is our rebellion, yours and mine, against God. And our rebellion against God is not like the Boston Tea Party, where the rebellion comes from been wronged or treated unjustly. No, our rebellion against God is the kind

of rebellion we typically see in two or three-year-olds and teenagers, who foolishly think that they know more than the parents who love them and thus deliberately, stubbornly, persistently, angrily do what they want to do instead of what the parents who love them know is best for them. Similarly, what the story is about is how we deliberately, stubbornly, persistently, angrily do what we want to do instead of what the God who loves us has told us to do.

And what has God told us to do? Well, it's all here in this one book. The Older Testament lifts up the 10 moral laws God wants us to obey:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.
3. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

And in the New Testament, God gave us Jesus and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). Thus Jesus commanded that we love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. And by the example of his very life, Jesus commanded that we live our lives as he lived his: lovingly serving others by showing them compassion; forgiveness; peace; justice; and hope.

So what today's story is about isn't just Adam and Eve being tempted and eating forbidden fruit. What it's about is us not following the 10 Commandments, us not living as Jesus lived, us disobeying God--us rebelling against God--us living our lives the way we want to live them, instead of the way God has told us to live them, the way God knows is best for us.

Oh, and before we leave the "what's" the story about, another name for what the story is about is sin. Disobedient rebellion against the God who created us, loves us, and is our Heavenly Parent can also be called sin. Any time we turn our backs on what God would have us do, any time we're not

obedient to God, we're putting a barrier between ourselves and God--we're sinning.

Now, **where** does today's story occur? On the surface, it took place in the Garden of Eden. And some people get all hung up on exactly where the Garden of Eden was located. But that's not really important. In fact, I like Caryle Marney's answer when one of his students asked him, "Where was Eden?" Dr. Marney put down his pen, turned to the college freshman, and replied, "I can tell you exactly. In Tennessee." "What?" gasped the student. "Yes. Knoxville, Tennessee, 215 South Elm Street," Marney insisted. "It was there on Elm Street, when I was a boy, that I stole a quarter out of Mama's purse and ran to the store and bought a bag of peanut clusters and ate them as fast as I could. Afterward, I was so ashamed that I came back home to 215 Elm Street and hid in the closet. Mom found me and asked, 'Why are you hiding? What have you done?' I personally don't think anybody needs help locating their own Eden, do you? That's the place where we first knowingly betrayed and disobeyed God."

Indeed today's story occurs everywhere, for sin is found throughout our world. In every country. In every culture. In cities, as well as in rural areas. In those of every faith. In women, men, and children. In schools, businesses, government, the courts, in places of worship, and even in homes. We see it every time we open the newspaper or tune into the news on the radio, the internet, or the television. Robberies; assaults; hunger; adultery; envy; discontent; lies; the decline in church attendance; the worship of money and popularity over God. In the greed of bankers and CEO's who care nothing for others, there is sin. When politicians put party or personal reelection above doing the right thing to help hurting people, there is sin. When businessmen care more for profits than the pollution they create, there is sin. When a ball player uses illegal substances, there is sin. When a man goes behind his wife's back and has an affair, a child, there is sin. Many of us were shocked with the news of a nine-year-old girl (Darlwin Carlisle) who was found in an abandoned house in Gary, Indiana. She was locked in the unheated attic of an abandoned house by her mother, who was on drugs and in search of a fix. Doctors said that the girl's frostbitten legs were so damaged after being in the extreme cold for five days that they had to amputate both legs. The mother's concern was not for her nine-year-old

daughter who needed her, but for a drug-induced high which would black out the reality of the world. Sin is everywhere.

Finally, **why** is today's story so important? Today's story is important for at least five reasons. First, it's important because we often don't recognize ourselves as sinners. David Jeremiah told the story of a suburban neighborhood in which several residents were extremely upset at the reckless and fast driving that was occurring in their quiet subdivision. They organized a petition drive and demanded that the police patrol the area with greater frequency and penalize drivers who ignored the speed limits. The police obliged and immediately ticketed five drivers who ignored the speed limits. All of them were fuming at the fines they received. It seems, however, that all five of these ticketed drivers had signed the petition calling for enforcement. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). And as the First Letter of John says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Second, today's story is important because it reminds us how important it is for us to want to make good choices in our lives. A man went to the doctor for a physical exam. After the exam, the doctor said, "You're in terrible shape. If you don't change your lifestyle, you're going to die." The man said, "Well, Doc, what should I do?" The doctor said, "The best thing you can do is stop drinking, stop carousing, stop staying out all night long." The man was silent for a moment, and then he asked, "What's the next best thing I can do?"

Third, the story of Adam and Eve tells us to expect that making the right choices will be difficult for us. The Apostle Paul said, "I don't do the good that I want to do; instead, I do the that I do not want to do" (Romans 7:19). Paul and all of us are like the little boy who was standing in front of a display counter of candy. He had that "Boy, I'd like some candy look" on his face. But, he didn't have any money. The manager walked by, smiled at the boy, and asked, "Are you trying to make up your mind which candy bar you want?" "No, sir," said the boy. "I'm trying to make up my mind not to take one and run." Life has a way of setting before us one temptation after another. We need to expect such daily struggles if we're going to make the right decisions.

Fourth, today's story is important because all too often, like Adam and Eve, when we make the wrong choices, we find excuses for our sins. We don't take responsibility for our sins. In the presence of witnesses, a man recently shot his girl friend. At the trial, he admitted that he shot her, but he asked to be exonerated because he had taken cocaine. We like to blame our sins on circumstances or the environment in which we were raised. We may blame our parents for failing to discipline us. The fault may be in our genes. It is an easy cop-out to blame others.

I read about a man who was suing a hospital. A doctor had performed staple surgery on his stomach to help him lose weight. A couple of days after his operation, he raided the hospital refrigerator and stuffed himself with everything he could find. This tore open the staples and forced another surgery. He sued the hospital for having a refrigerator near his room. He claimed the temptation was too great. Thus, his complications were not his own fault but the hospital's fault!

Charles Schulz captured this blaming tendency in the cartoon in which Marcia telephoned Charlie Brown and said, "Guess what, Chuck...the first day of school, and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault, Chuck." "My fault?" Charlie Brown replied, surprised. "How could it be MY fault? Why do you always say everything is MY fault!" "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me!"

Then there was that little girl who even blamed God for her misbehavior. Her mother, who had sent her to her room, heard her praying. "God, I am stuck here because of YOU, you know. Last night I prayed for you to help me be a good girl. Well, you didn't, so it's your fault!"

Fifth, the story of Adam and Eve is important because it reminds us of God's grace. God had told Adam and Eve that the consequence of their disobedient rebellion would be death. He told them very clearly, "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." (Genesis 2:16-17). But when they sinned and ate of the forbidden fruit, death wasn't God's response. Even in this Older Testament story, God responded to his creatures' rebellion with grace. As the Apostle Paul expressed it, "Where sin

abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). God does not desire the death of a sinner; instead, he wants healing and reunion with the sinner.

So, our final question is **how?** How do we sinners find healing and reunion with God? How do we find such blessed peace and harmony once again?

First, as Camus wrote in The Rebel, "We must learn to be humans (men) and not try to be God ... be satisfied to be humans (men)."

Second, we must take responsibility for what we've done, humbly repent of our sins, and ask for God's forgiveness.

Third, we must accept the forgiveness and grace God offers us. For, as the Apostle Paul expressed it in Romans, "just as sin came into the world through one man...much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift of grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many..." (Romans 5:12, 15, 18).

Finally, we must stay in close contact with God, so that we continue on with our lives remembering God's commandments, feeling his love, and wanting to be his obedient loving children. The Indian Jesuit and spiritual writer, Anthony de Mello, tells of a Muslim holy man (Sufi Bayazid) who once commented about himself: "I was a revolutionary when I was young, and my single prayer to God was, 'Lord, give me the energy to change the world.' As I approached middle-age and realized that half my life was gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to, 'Lord give me the grace to change all those with whom I come in contact. If I can change my family and friends, I will be satisfied.' Now that I am an old man and my days are numbered, my one prayer is, 'Lord, give me the grace to change...'"

Today's story is old news but current news, and it's good news: God responds to sin not with death but with grace. He desires not the death of the sinner but rather healing and reunion with the sinner. God's love for us is so great that he gives us grace. God's power is so great that he can bring about such change as healing and reunion. Good news indeed! Thanks be to our loving and powerful God. Amen.

--Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; January 31, 2010