

The Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 10, 2018, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-21

***"One Act of Disobedience"***

Have you ever wondered – ‘how did we get into this mess?’ I mean – how did we get this sin stuff getting us into the threat of hell and damnation? In order to understand that we need to go right to the beginning – Genesis.

There are some people who we will call ‘Evolutionists’ who believe that life began at the very bottom of a pond and it has been a constant climb to achieve greatness ever since. On the other hand, there are people who believe the Bible’s account that mankind began at the top – and through disobedience, through temptation and lies, fell from that top and became resident at a significantly lower place, filled with pain, work, and temptation, sorely in need of someone to save them. Depending on your outlook, on your starting place, then your understanding of your life’s journey will differ greatly.

I happen to believe that the Bible account is real, and that God is our Creator, and He simply asked one thing of the first people – to follow His directions. Following directions seems to be very difficult for some people. Back in 2000 I had my left knee replaced at Memorial Hospital in Jacksonville. Another man had his knee replaced at the same time. We went through physical therapy in the hospital at the same time as well. Our doctor’s appointments were at the very same time too. At the first appointment to get the staples removed – I was wearing the ‘teds’ – those white compression stockings, and I had two crutches. This man who had his knee replaced, we will call him Bob, only had one ‘ted’ on and one crutch. Well, needless to say, as the year progressed, we kept meeting each other – and he kept doing things ahead of the doctor’s schedule. Then came our one-year checkup with x-rays, and then we each went into separate exam rooms with our wives. We heard crying in that other room – really bad crying. When the doctor came in I asked him what was going on? HE said – “do you remember Bob?” I said “sure.” I said, “is that Bob crying?” He told me that it was and that I did everything that he told me to do, and I don’t need to see you for another year. Next Wednesday Bob’s knee is being re-done – because he could not follow my directions. That is what happened in the Garden. God asked people to follow directions – do what I tell you to do. Doing so, they would enjoy paradise with Him forever. I believe it doesn’t get any easier than that.

(Holding up the Bible to Genesis) See this? Because of this – all of the rest of the Bible was necessary! Because of what happened here (in Genesis 3) we are here today, and we are living the way we are living and putting up with what we are putting up with. All of this was necessary because the directions of Genesis chapter three could not be followed. Man was told in Genesis chapter two – but we will talk more about that later.

Enter the serpent, in today’s Old Testament reading and immediately, he goes on the attack about what God has told them. *“He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'? The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in*

***the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.***" (Genesis 3:1-3) In order to fully understand what God told the man – even before the woman was created – God told him, "*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*" (Genesis 2:16-17) Did you see the difference here? The serpent was indeed ‘crafty’ as he had the woman right where he wanted her, he completely changed what God had said. He asked the woman if God really said you cannot eat from ANY tree in the garden, and then he went for the gusto – by trying to totally call God a liar! She completely changed what God said – maybe because the man had told her this or because she became confused, by the pressure of having the serpent talking to her. Suddenly she was saying the tree in the middle – not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even adding that if you touch it you will die. God didn’t say that! Have you ever played the old game “telephone?” You line up a group of people and whisper a phrase in the first person’s ear – and watch it change as it is passed down the line to something drastically different. Something similar just happened here. Then the serpent takes this and said, "*You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" (Genesis 3:4-5)

By this time, she was so confused because she was probably witnessing the first ‘shell game.’ You know – follow the pea under the three shells – and guess where it will be after significant shuffling. What this crafty ‘devil’ told her made it sound ok, insinuating that God had said this out of jealousy. The temptation that must have been racing through her mind was like going shopping on ‘Black Friday’ and wanting to act on every sale in front of you – not thinking of the consequences to your finances. As the reading tells us in verses 6 and 7: "*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*" (Genesis 3:6-7)

God gave them one simple instruction – it was OK to eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, but not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What would seem to be easy to follow had suddenly become so enticing by the words of the serpent – filled with lies. Her husband was right by her side when they ate – so the blame is shared. There is no ‘she made me do it’ as many have joked through the years. The late comedian, Flip Wilson used to play a character named Geraldine, who always said “the devil made me do it,” but here the blame belonged squarely on the shoulders of the man and woman – and therefore with all humanity to follow.

When they eat the fruit, their eyes are opened, but it does not bring what the snake promised them. They gain the experience of deciding between good and bad, but in doing so involves doing the opposite to what God said, and they do not gain anything like true wisdom. They start off as naive, simple people, but when they decide to violate the one constraint God placed on them, they do not become mature and wise people but instead very unwise. I could not help but keep thinking about poor old Bob – who had to have his knee replaced all over again

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because he could not follow the instructions of the doctor. They know they have exposed themselves, so they try two ways to hide, and neither of them were very successful. A fig leaf or two is not much of a way of covering up. When they hear God coming, they also try to hide in the trees. For the first time they are filled with fear in their relationship with God – they try to hide from Him. Previously they walked with Him in the Garden; it was joyful; it was a relationship. Now they were afraid of what He was going to do to them.

God of course knows what they have done – just as He knows where they are – but He calls out, *"Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"* (Genesis 3:9-11) Mankind was never created to be afraid of the Creator; the One who wanted to walk in the garden with us. The man's reaction is to sidestep the issue and blame someone else. This instinct was not how they were created – but the spirit of disobedience filled them to do so. The man said, *"The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."* Then the LORD God said to the woman, *"What is this you have done?"* The woman said, *"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."* (Genesis 3:12-13) If possible, blame the person who is accusing you *and* blame someone else! Their relationship with God now was tarnished – and their relationship with each other became one of blame and distrust. "It's not MY fault!" Have you ever heard that?

God addresses the serpent and describes how its existence will now change, and the distrust between it and the humans – promising that the offspring of humanity would crush the serpent's head – how Jesus would defeat sin, death and Satan on the cross. To the woman God promised that life would now be painful in bearing children. Do you remember that there were two trees that God spoke about when He told Adam about the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? You see, prior to this time they could eat from the tree of life and have eternal life, and have no pain, and who knows how children are born! Now, things were going to be different. There would now be pain in bearing children.

To the man named Adam, which means "to be red" or "earth" possibly referring to the color of the soil that he was taken from when God created him. It reminds me of that old song 'a hundred pounds of clay.' The name Adam means 'to be red' or 'earth' God said life for him would change. Food would no longer just be provided, from tree from any tree, but now it must come due to hard labor of the soil. God also spoke the words that we recall on Ash Wednesday when you come forward to receive your ashes: *"for dust you are and to dust you will return."* (Genesis 3:19)

Adam had been charged by God to name all of the birds and animals and now *"Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living."* (Genesis 3:20) The man named his wife "Eve" which means "life, living, and lively" – and it is from her that now other life will come into being. They had Cain and Able – and then Seth.

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From this one act of disobedience – came not only the destruction of the relationships, but death came as well. Animals were killed by God to produce the skin to clothe Adam and Eve – and from this came the first animal sacrifice. In the verses following today’s reading God sends them into exile from the Garden: *“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”* (Genesis 3:23-24)

Life for all humanity changed forever because of this one act of disobedience. God didn’t strike them down and decide to start all over again – but instead made life much harder for them – but the death that the serpent said would happen – would indeed come at the end of their earthly existence. God had a plan that would repair the ‘eternal’ relationship and save them forever – by sending His Son, Jesus – who walked in the garden with them – and He would die, sacrificing Himself in their place – in our place - to repair the fabric of their lives – their eternal lives. All because of one act of disobedience.