

First Sunday of Lent  
Sermon for February 10, 2008  
Raymond Raney

Genesis 2:15-17;3:1-7  
Psalm 32  
Romans 5:12-19  
Matthew 4:1-11

Anybody tripped in the dark yet? I know it's only been four days since Ash Wednesday, but it's always good to keep a reality check at hand: otherwise you could fall and just think you stooped down to take a short rest. It's tempting to rationalize our dips and slips into appropriate moments for reflection, those little white lies. Just resting my eyes. We really want to be spared the trial of our resolve. That's why we pray each time we say the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." – Please!

But it's all about temptation: from the very beginning in Genesis to the wilderness beyond the Jordan. We wander about, slipping in the mud, tripping in the dark, walking into cholla, and forgetting which way to turn. That's what Lent is for: to BE in the wilderness just long enough to finally turn and follow Jesus down that triumphal road to Jerusalem at the end of Lent, on Palm Sunday, just to get blindsided and crucified. And why is all this happening? As we are reminded in the first lesson, it was a little deal in paradise we'd just as soon forget, but can't.

We all know the story: Eve is tricked by the serpent and takes a bite of the apple, and convinces Adam to take a bite, and they get kicked out of the garden – expelled from paradise. Most of us know the story – well actually – not quite.

First off – there was no apple. It's a fruit of some sort. The idea that it was an apple comes from John Milton's Paradise Lost. Also, Satan's not involved. That comes from Milton also, where Satan is said to have said: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Milton made that up. It's not in the Scriptures.

Secondly, according to our first reading, Eve isn't so much tricked as persuaded by the promise of knowledge. And thirdly, Adam is not tricked or convinced to eat the fruit. He's there for the whole exchange. When she hands the fruit to him, he eats it. Kind of like Marge Simpson handing a doughnut to Homer. Ummmmm, eat food!

Eve was naïve. She took the serpent at its word when it held out the promise of knowing, the promise of wisdom, the promise of being able to figure out the world on her own.

That's appealing to me. I've spent far too much time in school being educated not to fall for that big temptation. Wisdom is lauded throughout history. Solomon is held up by the writers of the Old Testament for choosing wisdom, not for being particularly bright about

being a king and ruling his people with equity. So wisdom for Eve is the great temptation, as it would be for many of us, and it was for those who wrote the Old Testament.

We live in a world based on knowing new things, a world where we cherish the search for truth and our ability to understand. We prefer to be able to rely on ourselves to figure things out.

A friend of mine was sharing with our Bible study last week about her grandson. He's ten years old. A darling kid in a good home with a loving family. But last week, his mom walked into his room to find him packing his suitcase. She did the good mother thing and sat down with him.

“What are you doing?”

“Packing.”

“Where are you going?”

“I'm running away.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, I'm running away.”

“Can I ask why you're running away?”

Her son stopped packing and sat down beside his mother.

“I'm just confused.”

“Confused about what?”

“I just can't figure out what my life's about.”

“You know I love you? Your father loves you. Your brother and sister love you. You've got lots of friends...”

“Yeah, but I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing.”

With that she took her son in her arms.

“Would it be alright if you stayed here and we can work on figuring that out together.”

At some point we all have to leave home, leave what we know for what we don't know. If Eden were your story, what would you have Eve do?

“You won't die,” the serpent tells her, and they don't. Does that mean that God lied to them about the true consequences? In Jewish tradition Eve's disobedience was the source of a divine gift: mercy. God granted clemency to Eve and to Adam and commuted their death sentence to life: the gift of our mortal life.

And by God's mercy we have been granted the gift of Jesus, who was tempted as we are but did not sin.

How easy it would have been for Jesus to accept any of the temptations of Satan.

Imagine turn the stones to bread – NOT just to feed Jesus' personal hunger, but to turn stones (plural) into bread (plural) to feed all the hungry of the world.

Imagine – throw yourself off the temple and show them all that you are the Son of God. No mocking, no flogging, no crucifixion –no doubts – just glory, laud and honor.

Imagine – you can rule the world and have power over all. You can end all the sorrow, all the pain, all the injustice. You can bring Heaven – here and now! Just bend the knee. Trust in me, here and now.

But Jesus chooses to trust God, and to trust that in the end all will be well. The Kingdom of God has come near, and we are tasked with the work – to make the kingdom come. Jesus left the job undone, and left us with the task to make the Kingdom near to be the Kingdom come – here and now, in this time and place.

It is our job to make God's desire for love and mercy in Christ to be the love and mercy we give to each and every one of us.

Our job is to make life safe for all our children. Safe and nurturing so that every child may be taken into the loving arms of loving parents so that we, as the family of all humanity, may embrace all children so that they can be secure to explore and wonder at what their lives may mean and discover what they are to do.

We must work that all children may share the love given to my friend's grandson.

May God's will be done, and may we each do what we have been called to do.