

John Sampson
"Clothes for the Road"
Text: Genesis 2:15 - 17; 3:1 - 7
Preached at KVCC
March 1, 2020

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

On Wednesday evening we began our journey of Lent, which will teach us something about the truth of our existence, of what it means to be human. It will also teach us something about the experience we call God, and how God and humanity are in relationship with one another.

And it teaches us not through history, and not through rational argumentation, but through story and parable. Lent teaches us using genres that contain ambiguity, and a never-ending possibility of meanings. These stories and parables hold truth, even if the events they describe are not factually true.

And so this morning, this first Sunday in Lent, we hear a story, not about Jesus, but about the beginning of all things. And when I say this story is about the beginning I am not saying it is about the temporal, historical beginning of all things, although that is how many of us hear it. For me, when I say the story of the Garden is the beginning I mean it in the sense that it is foundational to our ancestors' understanding of what it means to be human.

In this story we are transported to a time outside of time and we find ourselves in Paradise, with the first human couple. They live without fear, without shame, in deep communion with each other, with Creation, and with God. Although I don't think the Garden ever existed in an empirical way, I do think we carry within our souls a deep desire for the intimacy this story pictures. And it is such a deep desire, and so viscerally powerful, that we can almost experience it as memory.

We feel we have known the Garden.

But then the ordinariness of our lives comes back into focus, and we are more than aware of the fact that we no longer reside in the Garden. We live in conflict with one another. Our earth is dying. And God may no longer always seem present to us. And so we find ourselves caught between a haunted emotion of perfect relationship, and the splintered truth of our daily lives.

And then Lent arrives. And it is made for people just like us. Because Lent contains both an extended and unflinching contemplation of the brokenness of life, and a blueprint for how

we can experience true Intimacy. Notice I didn't say Lent gives us a map back to the Garden. The Garden never existed. If our goal is to regain a physical Paradise we will always be frustrated. What our tradition offers us instead is a transformed here and now, a transformed human heart, a transformed relationship with God. And this transformed state has a name. Our ancestors called it Eden.

We say we want to travel to Eden, but our story tells us why we can't get there. We don't live in intimacy with ourselves, and with Creation, and with God because our unchecked desire and quest for power breaks apart our relationships. Instead of giving us security, our ancestors tell us that to live by unbridled desire will leave us naked and shamed and scared. To attempt omnipotence and omniscience instead of humility and a poverty of spirit will never allow us to become gods. It will only distance us from the loving God that already exists.

Lent is an exploration of how we let desire break apart our lives and the world. Lent is also an exploration of how these fractures can be healed. And this healing doesn't come through more violence, more blood, more crosses, more sacrifice, and more suffering. Let me say this in a different way. Jesus on the cross, bloodied, bruised and crowned with thorns is not a symbol of salvation. It is the expression of the sickness of our hearts, hearts of unsupervised desire, hearts that never learned our teacher's commandment to love God, and love one another as ourselves.

Instead Lent will teach us that true healing, the path to life-giving intimacy, which plants a new Eden right here and right now, comes only through our own compassion and love and selflessness.

Having followed their desire and eaten of the tree our story tells us that the primordial humans sew a set of clothes to cover their shame and protect them from a world that now seems threatening and alien.

But just a couple verses further on God appears to Adam and Eve as they are falling out of the Garden and she gives them a new set of clothing, clothing she has made with her own hands, clothing to protect them and keep them warm. She enfolds them in her love because she will never stop loving them, she will never stop loving us, as long as She is, and as long as we are.

Because God has never given up the dream of Eden, the dream of intimacy with her children. And she will keep inviting us to transform ourselves and our hearts so that we can come to know Eden, which is nothing more than this world transformed.

Everything that is about to happen on this journey of Lent contains within it this Divine invitation, this call to return to the beginning of all things, this call to come to know Eden.

Amen.