

## Christ in Genesis | Hope from the Beginning

### The Seed of the Woman

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Genesis 3.1-15

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden '?"<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;<sup>3</sup> but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"<sup>4</sup> The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!<sup>5</sup> "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.<sup>8</sup> They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"<sup>10</sup> He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."<sup>11</sup> And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life;<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."*

Today begins a very short series of sermons – the 2013 Advent Series – to help us prepare for Christmas. And we're calling this Advent series, Christ in Genesis: *Hope from the Beginning*.

If you've been around St Andrews for a long time you may know that we make liberal use of that key Jesus Christ gave the Church when, after the resurrection, He taught the disciples and Luke records (quote) "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." (Luke 24.27)

So, we see, as Jesus Christ intends, we see that He IS the interpretive key to the Old Testament – it's all about Him. And we've seen that in our recent study of Genesis (the Fall of 2011, 2012 and concluding in 2013) but this is maybe an attempt to get even more intentional – a kind of "Genesis redux" – five passages that are especially vivid in pointing to God's ADVENT in Jesus

Christ, God's APPROACH to us, God's LANDING, GOD'S ARRIVAL to our fallen planet in Jesus Christ – we have that hope from the start of the Bible and that's our focus in these next few weeks.

Today, we begin with the bad, BAD news of death intruding into God's good earth and it spoils paradise and sends us, naked and ashamed in search of cover and then sends us out of God's presence, away from the source of life and drives us East of Eden carrying this contagion of death. But we'll ALSO see that *IN* this dark moment (the entrée of death) there is also a *deep tone of approaching mercy* – the first rumblings of indestructible life and LOVE that will overwhelm death in a NEW CREATION.

Let's look at: 1) Death and All His Friends 2) Fix You: The Story of "Two Proto's" 3) Life in Technicolor (even East of Eden)

The NT puts it this way: *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned"* (Rom 5.12)

Death comes into the world by sin. John Calvin said we were not *created* immortal but that physical death was intended *to be something we would welcome without fear* as a peaceful transition to the next life *but sin made death something dreadful...*

And the death that enters the garden (from sin) is NOT SIMPLY physical death (in fact – they don't die physically...at least not immediately) but inwardly and spiritually, psychically and relationally they die. And each of us feels it in a number of ways. We have a sense that something's not right, what Professor John Collins calls "the often inarticulate yearning that is part of every person's experience". Every generation of rock-and-roll singers and philosophers feel it...and expresses it, because try as we might to ignore it we can't.

And this passage – Genesis 3 – is there to tell us how it started – how sin and death entered the world; why you don't feel totally at ease in your own skin. This is the story of death and all his friends.

The story of sin and death starts with a cast of characters: First, the serpent. In some way, an animal was evidently a host to a parasite whom the Bible will later call Satan or the devil, the vandalizer. And in some way this *being* is able to employ an animal to communicate with the second character, the woman.

She's *alone* in her conversation with the serpent (and remember: "it is not good for man to be alone" – some have wondered why the man didn't step in. He had responsibilities to care for her *and to defend the Garden...*but the third character, Adam, is silent... leaves the woman alone and goes sort of passive...stands by doesn't step in.)

The fourth character is “the LORD God” and that’s what He is called in this whole section (starting in ch. 2, v. 5) but then, a glaring break in a pattern. He’s called “YHWH Elohim” again and again...and that stresses that He is the Almighty Creator (Elohim) who also entered into sacred relationship or covenant based on His kindness. And the name He uses in conjunction with His kindness and covenant is “YHWH”.

So when this whole section focuses on *humanity in relationship with Deity*, the name is “YHWH Elohim” but suddenly...jarringly...the serpent breaks that pattern and refers to Him simply as God, the Creator. And conveniently the parasite omits reference to the LORD God’s vast generosity and love and covenant intentions for His children... The Jewish scholar from Berkley, Robert Alter, translates the serpent’s words of v. 1 like this (the serpent says): “Though God said you shall not eat from any tree in the garden – ” a dangling suggestion about a generic god.

And the woman... answers the serpent *WITH the vocabulary the serpent suggested*... She says, “God HAS said ‘You shall not eat or touch it or you will die’”. She is on her way to forgetting the grace and wild generosity in the Lord of the covenant. She is forgetting God’s *covenant* name...opting for the generic name...and remembering only the “shall not.”

Then, she’s RIFE to take the next step. “You surely will not die! For *God* knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like *God* able to determine what is good and what is evil.”

“God is a liar... is insecure...He’s afraid of you and unwilling that you get the good stuff that He wants only for His own selfish self!”

Now we could stop there and ask: IS that what the evidence suggested? That God is stingy? That He was unkind? Just the opposite! Genesis 1 & 2 shows a Lord who wants to give everything to His beloved children, *who wants to enthrone them* and make them like little gods. His generosity is unbounded!

Couldn’t the woman see it all around her? Couldn’t the man have reminded her? How irrational is that?

So what was the issue? Well, on one level it was a matter of boundaries. God simply wanted the truth. The forbidden tree was a reminder to them that they were not God and could not determine what is good and what is evil. If they acted as if they were the creators and not the creatures, it would be a cosmic lie *and God would not participate in that!*

BUT on a deeper level, THAT sin, ALL sin is a matter of trust. God was calling them to simply trust Him. They had every reason to do so. He was saying, “Despite appearances, that fruit, the authority to define the nature of what is good and what is evil, *will not be good for you*... Trust Me.”

But ...the woman said – I will trust my own eyes...I'll trust this other voice...I'll do what seems right to me.

And the man follows along...trusts NOT the word of His Creator and Father... the LORD of Generosity and Grace ...instead he counts God untrustworthy. There is a way that SEEMS right to a man but the end of that way is death. (Pro.16.25)

The results of their sin (I think it's safe to call it that) the death is self-consciousness and alienation from one another and from God – they feel naked and ashamed...they are afraid and they are messed up.

Immediately, death gives birth to death and they think they can hide from God...and they want to hide from God. *They used to run toward Him when they heard Him...* but now they run away.

So, what can be done to fix their problem *their great disappointment* and their fear and shame? Well, the passage outlines two proto-solutions to this death:

The first fix, their fix we could call “proto-religion.” And all religion after this is only a disguised attempt to run, hide, cover and blame... They'll do anything to get rid of that feeling of shame – imagine that they were saying, “Shhh...He won't see us behind these fig leaves...if we pray 5 times a day, he'll leave us alone...if we give a percentage of our money to the church...if we live by good values, our good will outweigh our few mistakes...”

But as their attempts failed and they cannot hide...the LORD God introduces His fix – I will fix you. He approaches them in the garden and they hear His footsteps...HIS APPROACH...HIS ADVENT. He questions them and *makes them face the shame*. It's God's dark grace and it's the start of His fixing the couple He loves ...His GOOD NEWS for fallen humanity.

But when He approaches and converses they try to get rid of their shame by blaming... their religion isn't working. He blames the woman – whom YOU gave me (he's really trying to put the shame on God!) and the woman blames the serpent.

But the LORD God steps in to defend them and He curses the dark power behind the serpent...banishes him to eternal shame. In that curse God embeds a promise often called the “proto-evangelium” – i.e. the first announcement of the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ in the whole Bible.

Speaking to the devil God says, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel.”* (v.15)

It's a promise that a Champion would one day appear. Adam wanted to put the shame on God and God is beginning to show us, "Only I CAN bear the *terror* of your shame... and I will bear it...I WILL carry what you can not...I will take your blame!"

A second Adam will come – true Man and true God in one Person – born of a woman and yet all-powerful to defend us. *And the serpent will bruise His heel but He will bruise the serpent's head* and put an end to our shame...like no religion could.

When the man and woman hear the promise, they get grace and they believe...Adam says (later in this chapter), "I will call my wife Eve (which means life) because she will bring life into the world...the seed of the woman...she will be a vessel of grace" It's a recognition of God's grace and it leads to repentance.

Avoidance and escapism and religion and self-help, they all stem from fear and lead to fear...but here in the promise of a Champion, (not something we do for God but God coming to US, and Advent) the seed of the woman, here is grace and the POWER of God to undo death and sin and shame... and it leads Adam and Eve to abandon blame...and walk in truth and humility even as they walk East of Eden.

Now this is the story of how our race got twisted and it's simple enough for children to understand (and we may think of as primitive cultures) AND it's psychologically complex and insightful enough to really INFORM modern people living in complicated South Florida...BECAUSE it explains and analyzes the way we are – it reveals human nature. And human nature is the same...in every age and across cultures.

And if we're going to live full lives...I mean NOT just flat, unexamined, color-less, black-and-white lives – we have to take away these basic truths.

We're fallen and we can't get up. We are NOT ok in ourselves but require *a radical intervention from outside of ourselves*. From the start God is telling us that HE WILL ENTER IN, by the offspring of a Virgin's womb, He WILL approach us (*as He once approached this cowering couple in the garden...in their Sunday best...their fig leaves!*) God WILL come to us.

And only those who are convinced that they are NOT ok...only those who need grace...need this invasion of a foreign power, the Advent of God...ONLY those who have felt shame and recognize their own powerlessness to fix it...ONLY THE HUMBLE WILL MAKE ROOM for humble God who makes His approach into our fallen world by the womb of a peasant girl.

*And if you want life in Technicolor this week*, you have to see this – YOUR NEED AND GOD'S GRACE IN JESUS CHRIST.

If you see BOTH – then you'll be moving in the direction of fullness (even as we live, East of Eden and awaiting a New Creation) but you'll be able to understand yourself and others...If you see that, from the start, God had purposed GRACE for the broken, THEN you can really receive His love, mercy and security and you can put down the blaming and the fig-leaf games and the religiosity...and you can LIVE...rescued by the Seed of Eve, the mother of the Living.

### **The Communion**

Our understanding of the Holy Communion, in the Presbyterian Tradition, is that we commune both vertically and horizontally. It's with God (vert) and with one another (horiz). So, if you are committed to the Head of the Church, i.e. Jesus Christ and the Body (i.e. you are attached to actual people), if you're a member in regular attendance of some church that teaches the gospel then come and receive. If that does NOT describe you, please stay with us for these next few mins but don't take the bread and wine until you talk to one of the elders or to me ...WE WANT TO INCLUDE YOU AUTHENTICALLY.

There's a hymn from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it remembers Luke chapter seven where the sinful woman washes Jesus Christ's feet with her tears. The hymn reads:

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"I shall kiss Thine immaculate feet' says the woman fallen into many sins 'the feet whose steps resounded in Eve's ears in Paradise at sunset, when she hid in fear'".

In other words the same feet Eve heard walking in Paradise after her disobedience, when she hid in fear... these are the Feet that were pierced for us.

You have to know that and believe it if you are going to live East of Eden. Simply fearing death and judgment won't lead us to honesty and true repentance and purpose. Living in light of our coming death is a good thing...a clarifying thing...but it won't lead you to God. In fact it may lead you to hide from God.

The way past the flaming sword and back into the garden is not our fear or our hard work – it's the PROMISE. It was only after the promise came that Adam turned to the future with hope and saw his wife as mother of all who live. They believed the Gospel. It was grace not fear that led Adam and Eve to live with meaning even East of Eden in the Fallen world.

We need a fresh experience with these "immaculate feet" that were pierced for us...We need a nourishing encounter with Jesus Christ...Let's seek that at this Table now.