

“He Did *What?*”

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February 10, 2008
Text: Genesis 2:15-17, 3: 1-7

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Now one of the things you should know by now is that when I preach, it is a community event. It is not just about me preaching but it is about us being together, so I will ask you questions. And as they say, if you don't want to be called on or don't want to respond, don't let me catch your eye. (Laughter in the congregation) Look away quickly!

This morning you may have heard a familiar text from Genesis. How many of you have heard that story at least once in your lifetime? (Pause for response) Ok. How many of you have never heard that story? That might be the better question. (Pause for response) So we all come with some general knowledge of what I will be preaching about today. So this is another question I have for you. If you were to open your bibles to page 2, they have this nifty little invention they've done in the past 2 hundred years. They've started to title things. Right? So I am going to give you an opportunity to find it because I give open book tests. (laughter) There will be a question later in the sermon. And all of you should get it.

So we've heard this story in church and if we haven't heard it in church, we've heard it in our families. And we may have heard it even in a joke. Now I know that every person has heard one, but I promise that I won't tell you one because someone is always the butt of the joke. It's either going to be the snake, the woman the man or God. (laughter) And I don't think when we're talking about things as serious as sin and evilness....We might not want to make a joke. However I will tell you this....

There are only five kinds of snakes that my mother hates.....(putting up her hand and counting) *Big Ones, Little Ones, Live Ones, Dead Ones and Artificial Ones.* (Laughter) And any time, she encounters a snake she always runs back to this Genesis text and says, '*God has cursed them from the beginning.*' (laughter) And I say to her, "*But Mom, are you really sure that God has cursed them or your brothers just scared you with them?*" And she says, "*Its right there in the good book.*' And so from her perspective, God has from the beginning cursed this snake. So we know that the snake plays this part of evil in the world and for her, it takes in every snake that could possibly ever be and gives her justification not to like them.

So...maybe the snake is the problem in this story.

But I don't know about you, but I have heard that other people are the problem in this story. And I don't know about you but nobody in this story gets off good.

The snake is cursed for being crafty

The woman is cursed for eating the fruit of the tree when God obviously told her not to.

Adam is cursed because he should have told her the right way...now this is the interesting thing. I want you to look back at this story. We read it so fast that we often miss this. God says to them in Genesis three, God said to them. "Do not eat....Do no **EAT** of the fruit of this tree or you will die." Tell me how Eve said, "Do not eat of it, or do not TOUCH it." So if the only way she found out....somewhere in this, it got elaborated. Which I have heard this text be used to say...Don't say more than was given to you. Don't gossip. Don't expand. Don't elaborate. Don't embellish. Just say what needs to be said. There's a lot of stuff going on in this story.

But what is more interesting for me, is that all of this seems to be told on the part of humanity. See somebody got in trouble. (Pause) somebody got in trouble, somebody got punished. So that's what we often listen to. How many of you have heard of someone called St. Augustine of Hippo. See where I'm from they call him "*Aug..uh..steen.*" (like the town in Florida). When I went to college I said "*Aug..uh..steen.*" and they said no, "Augustine." St. Augustine has been called the father of western Christianity. He has been labeled the person who gave us the concept of "Original Sin." SO everything we know about this story has been filtered mainly through HIS eyes. He was an amazing father and wrote lots of theological books which are amazing bedtime or naptime books Bill (*who did the children's sermon on naps*). Because you wade through them about a page an a half and you're like this (head drooping and eyes falling).

And I don't know about you but when I read something this bad, I just want to sit it down and take a nap and maybe when I wake up it will go away. (laughter)

What's interesting about this though is we have to look at this story from perspective.

We have looked at it maybe from the snake's perspective; maybe from humanity's perspective. We've looked at it by who's at fault. I don't know about you, but in today's time we want to know when something goes wrong "who's fault is it?" If we can take it back to who's at fault, maybe we might know how to fix it. Maybe we...might...not ...get...put...in ..that...place. If someone's at fault, then maybe we're not responsible. I've heard this text used...

"If Eve had never done that, we women wouldn't be in trouble the way we are today."

"If Adam had told her... they wouldn't have gotten kicked out of the garden. We wouldn't be living in this world like we're living in it today."

"That's the reason those snakes are there. If those snakes hadn't a done that maybe they would have legs and wouldn't have been slithering around on their bellies."

But all of this, All of this is told through 'our' perspective.

It was interesting to me because St. Augustine wrote two things that were interesting. What is it called in your bible? This is a part of the pop quiz. What is it called in your bible? What is it titled in your bible. (Waiting for responses) The first sin. What else? ...Punishment. Humanity's punishment. Original Sin. What does that all tell you? Whose perspective is that from? If the focus is the perspective, then this story is about humanity, right? What has humanity done? What has happened and where does the responsibility lie? I'd like to say that looking at it from our perspective, is part of the sin. We can't get out of looking at it "through the people". What if we looked at it from God's perspective for once? What would we find that would be different? So we're going to go back and read this story and here's the other pop quiz question. I want us to name all the people that are participating in this story. So who are the characters? Who do we have that is participating in this story? (Pause for responses) We have a snake. We have Adam. We have Eve. We have God and the tree. ok. Because it's written in a text form, there are two perspectives that you may have forgotten. Every story has a "teller" and a "listener". Why was this story told the way it has been told and why do we hear it the way that we hear it. So these are the questions I am going to ask you as we go back into this.

Who is this story does not do what they are supposed to do?

See a friend of mine said to me, her daughter got bit by a snake, a rattlesnake and I called to check on how she was three years ago when it happened. She said, "She's doing fine, she got the antidote, everything's okay". I said, "Are you angry with her? Are you really upset that this happened? Are you going to get rid of all the snakes and she said, *"The snake only did what the snake does. I'm not angry with the snake. You see snakes defend themselves, they give off warning signs. This is what they do. Why would I be angry with the snake?"* So...

In the reading of this story, as I read it for you again, Who doesn't do what they're supposed to do? So listen to these words. Genesis 2:15-17, and I'll start again at 3:1-7

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden
to till it and to keep it.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man,
"You may freely to eat of every tree in the garden;

17 but of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat
for on the day when you eat of it you shall surely die."

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' "

4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 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.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loin clothes for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

17 And he said to them, you are now banished from the garden.

Who is it that didn't do what they were supposed to do?

You see the snake did what they told us the snake was going to do. In every children's story that I have ever heard, when they say the big bad wolf, we know that it is going to be a "BIG, BAD, WOLF." When they tell us at the beginning of this story the snake that is the slyest among all the creatures, we know what the snake is going to do. We also know that by humanity in whatever we do, we make mistakes, we embellish, we are.....human.

But you see in this story God, whose word is trusted above all others says, "*if you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will die.*" My friends who are a part of the Jewish community and we have this dialogue back and forth, says to me, "*We don't call this original sin, we call this original grace.*" *We call this the time from the beginning that we have known, that God has loved us so much, that even though he said we would die...that we did not perish.* He loved us and could not let us go, could not banish us from creation because God's love was so much greater."

You see we're so caught up in this story. We're so caught up in this story about us and what it is that **we** do that we really forget how great God's love has been from the beginning. We want to talk about sin and who is to blame, we talk about who is responsible. But above all of it...God's love is amazing. Above all of it, God has from the beginning of time...not given up on us.

And in the moment, in the moment when presented with our failing, God chose to respond in grace. God's perspective was to change, so that we might have life.

That's what this Lenten season is about. It's about remembering. It's about drawing near for us in the Christian faith, to the one who came to remind us about God's amazing love and grace. It is about what we do, about how we respond, but most of all, it is always about God's love to never give up, to never lose hope even in the midst of all the sin in the world.

Will you pray with me?

O God we come asking you to forgive us from our selfishness because the lens we see through is our own.

We are so caught and trapped in ourselves that we cannot see things from a different perspective

We're caught in the rut. We're caught in what we've been taught.

And we have forgotten to look back to you.

So O God in the midst of this place,
in the midst of our lives from this day and ever forward
be with us.

Call us back to look at things from your perspective of love and forgiveness and grace
and let us share it with one another.
In your holy name we pray, Amen.

****Pastor's note: Because I am not of the Jewish community, I have used Jessie's story and our dialogue together for the purposes of this sermon. In fact checking I only know that Hebraic tradition does not label this story as a text lifted up for original sin.***

*Information on St. Augustine can be found easily on Wikipedia or in the many books at your local library.