

St Andrew's on The Terrace 5 May 2019 Easter 3 Eve sinner or seeker?

Readings for the Gathering

Hebrew Bible

Genesis 3: 1-13

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really 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 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.'" 4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from 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 coverings 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? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 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 deceived me, and I ate."

Gospel

'On the Road to Emmaus'

Luke 24:13-32

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they did not recognize him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. 28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Contemporary reading

from "WomanWisdom"

by Miriam Therese Winter

Sing, creation,/ sing your praise/ to the wonderful wonder-filled One always:

Maker of all/ Mother of all /Lover of all the living

Sing, humanity, women, men, everyone,/ ***the faith-filled and all who would have faith again;***

all races, all ages, all cultures, all sizes:/ ***from you the Spirit-filled harmony rises,***

touching the stars, encircling the planet/ ***and spiralling back to the One Who began it;***

we sing in the name of all the living/ ***a psalm of gratitude and thanksgiving.***

Sing, creation,/sing your praise/to the wonderful, wonder-filled One always:

Maker of all/Mother of all/Lover of all the living

Reflection for the Gathering

In the two readings from the Scripture today we have two examples where eating simple food opens the inner eye of the soul of those involved.

In the case of Eve and her partner, they eat of the tree which had been excluded from their free use. The rules of Paradise in this myth were that if they wanted to remain in the paradisiacal state of child-like innocence and freedom from responsibility, then they must *not* eat of this particular tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Into their story comes the serpent, an archetypal symbol of transformation, growth and change. There is an alternative, the serpent suggests, they *could* eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and be forever changed, more conscious of themselves and the world around them.

As with every movement forward in consciousness, there is anxiety at breaking the rules associated with guilt until the new consciousness beds in.

In the Gospel story, the two walking home from Jerusalem, back to their village of Emmaus, are sunk in a blinkered state of depression and despair. Their blinkeredness is different from the blinkeredness of Adam and Eve's paradise but it has the same effect, the two are not conscious of more than their own state.

All they can think of is their own point of view; their own disappointment and disbelief; their disillusionment with the special man whom they had trusted and followed. They do not recognise Jesus in this state. They are too full of their own misery, self-pity and the shattered hopes which they describe to him as they walk the road. They no doubt listen to his explanations, but only heads are engaged, not hearts. Then, when he is invited in for the evening meal and he breaks the bread in the familiar gesture they have seen him perform many, many times before, quote: "their eyes were opened."

In the same way in the Garden of Eden, that paradise for innocents, the two original human beings found their eyes opened on absorbing the knowledge of good and evil, the fruit of consciousness. They become conscious of who they are, what they are, where they are. At first, they are *self*-conscious, then they reap the consequences of taking the bold step to be individual and are made responsible for their own growth and maturity.

As a consequence, as the story shows, they find that once you know about good and evil, you are in a different landscape. No longer are you free of responsibility, no longer free of pain, no longer able to leave everything to an almighty all-powerful being. They must work for their living and experience the inevitable pain that comes with creativity and generativity.

Of course, self-sufficient, self-reliant and conscious humans are tricky beings to manage for institutions and religion and society. They do not do the expected thing, they place the flow of life above watching the clock, they treat everyone equally and are suspicious of hierarchies and patriarchies. They trust themselves and do not give over their authority to others. They work to their own higher consciousness, not only working to please others. A more conscious person may be less compliant, less dependant and less obedient.

This myth of the beginning of the world and or the beginning of human life was first told over and over again. Then it was written down to provide the leadership and priesthood of Israel with an instruction manual for the faithful. In the process, the necessary step of disobedience which freed Adam and Eve into greater consciousness became viewed as a sin. Ultimate obedience to the almighty God and remaining in that paradise of innocence became prized above being individual and conscious of oneself and one's world. Not surprising, since in a basically tribal society obedience to the clan leader was a matter of life and death.

This describing of sinfulness and its conventional remedy of dependence on God can mean that it is possible for someone to be devotedly devout within the conventional orthodoxy of the church and yet still *not* be an active participant in their own destiny.

I can imagine that over time as this story was told and retold as the best explanation anyone had at the time for how the world and human life began, especially perhaps when it took its first written forms, this acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil could have become seen as something undesirable because that quality in people was often disruptive to the status quo.

We have seen since then individuals making the same move towards consciousness disrupting the event tenor of life at key moments of human social and spiritual and political history. Abraham uprooted his family on what must have seemed like a whim, Moses pulled the Israelite people out of bondage in Egypt, Samuel anointed the youngest son as king of Israel, Jael stopped Sisera in his tracks, Jesus defied the authorities of his time, Peter announced a new way of spirituality on Pentecost, Martin Luther stood up against practices he believed were wrong, liberation theologians called out the religious establishment of their time, Suzanne Aubert distributed compassion with an independent determination unusual in women of her time. You can all think of many more people who have come to be regarded as saints and martyrs and heroes because they broke the mould of passive obedience and reached for a mature, conscious life, becoming transformed in the process.

So it depends on your point of view whether Eve and her partner Adam were sinners or seekers. If being an individual, being present focused, accepted of others, wise or relaxed and trusting is something you consider suspect and dangerous, then you will rate Eve a sinner, a rebel against the decreed so-called natural order.

If you see trusting in the flow of life, being secure in yourself so you can truly listen to others, feeling loved and accepted for just being oneself as good, then you will see Eve as seeking her true self soul. The serpent was, in this moment, her soul guide, aiding her path to transformation as he plays the trickster role in this archetypal story. Under this understanding the serpent is not Satan but the earliest kind of spiritual direction or soul companion.

Many of you will have experienced the tension and call to something different and bigger, which required you to break free of conventional expectations or even rules which your parents or workplace or church had set up. You will know what Eve when through in her search. There is the pull of lethargy means you desperately want to stay in the comfort of Paradise, secure and looked after, taken care of by the Almighty Ones in your life. Yet, there is the urge to spread your wings, to know more of the world, to answer a call. Jung called that call the second invitation, we could call it the call to be born again into a more active participation in life. It is a call part of us resists because we know it will bring sorrow and pain, not only in the leaving of the particular paradise we have made for ourselves, but also in the new experiences we meet on this new path.

In those moments of our lives which are akin to Eve and Adam's eating of the fruit in this story we move from a mindless, more animal-like state to "real conscious life in space and time". We move into "a world of suffering, conflict and uncertainty. No wonder" says Edinger. "we are reluctant to take the step to greater consciousness."¹

If this sounds too much like navel gazing to you, reflect on how this greater consciousness assist work in social justice. Once we have eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in a political sense, we are no longer trusting child-like voters. We notice and acknowledge the fallibilities in our leaders, we become courageous enough to challenge them to do better, we find ourselves more clear-eyed and able to see through evasions and non-action of corporations and business.

¹ Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the Psyche*. Shambala Boston, 1992, p. 17

We also become more aware of our own collusion with injustice. For example, years ago, in the 1980s when Maori Renaissance was on the rise with accompanying unrest in New Zealand, I remember an older woman saying to me “we used to have such a good relationship with Maori”. She was thinking of watching a Maori cultural group performing in Rotorua for tourists in the 1960s. But the ‘better relationship with Maori’ she was remembering required Maori to be cultural showpieces for Pakeha consumption and required Maori to keep quiet about injustices done and about the inequalities still in place. Since her remembered ‘paradise’, we have come a long way, but like all paths to consciousness it has been a rocky ride. It has included suffering and pain as a consequence of the experience of growing up and becoming more aware of the reality of race relations in New Zealand. The problem was, she thought that pain and suffering meant the *wrong* thing was happening, when, paradoxically, the pain and suffering were signs of healing and reconciliation, however halting and however tentative.

The phrase ‘loss of innocence’ which has been used since the 15 March event in Christchurch refers to this same process. We are no longer under the illusion that we live in a lovely paradise where Muslims are safe and happy. We are no longer all safe and happy and secure in our belief that no New Zealand based non-Muslim would attack anyone. We know now what can happen, we have seen and heard what evil is like when unleashed by someone with an automatic weapon in his hands and hate in his heart.

This is not a one-off process. All through our mature lives, we will face the temptation to *not* eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. We will be tempted to remain in our own little paradises, unaware, but comfortable and at ease. We will be repelled by the cost of letting our eyes be opened to the real conditions of the world and of our own personality. So, in more than one Garden of Eden moment we will be caught on the horns of the eternal dilemma. Should we continue seeking more knowledge despite the pain it brings? Or, should we commit the sin of remaining ignorantly blinkered, but comfortable?

This is not a license to rebel at rules we dislike and to randomly and capriciously choose to defy authority at which we chafe. Each of these decisions to embrace consciousness more thoroughly are difficult and deep decisions which require careful thought and courage. They also require careful treatment of others whose lives are intertwined with ours. They may not understand our actions. They may well be hurt when we make deep changes in our lives because it will affect theirs. We cannot drag them into a stage of consciousness for which they are not ready, so part of the pain of becoming conscious is finding yourself in a different place from those whom you love. Jesus knew about that. He suggested his followers might have to leave their original families in order to truly follow him because love of the road to consciousness needed to be greater than our love for the comfort of family.

This then was the dilemma Eve faced. These are some of the consequences she and Adam found followed their decision to eat. No doubt the two on the road to Emmaus found after their eyes were opened, that their lives were never the same again.

Eve was tempted to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Even though conventional religion has said for millennia that it was the wrong decision, I think she made the right choice.

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