

March 1, 2020

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

If you are not familiar with the author, Ted Dekker, I hope you will check his work out. One of the reasons I really like him is that all of his books are about good vs. evil. His books pose some very interesting situations regarding how we respond to good and evil and how absolutely convoluted evil can be in our daily lives.

Good vs. evil is what our three texts today have in common. Our first lesson from Genesis finds us in the Garden of Eden with Adam, Eve, and that serpent where everything changed. Temptation, in this case-evil, has been present since almost day one.

Eve often gets a bad rap; she is sometimes given all the credit for the state of affairs that exists today. She, being the first one who disobeyed. But, in truth, she is simply one human being in this story. It could have been Adam who talked with the serpent and had the conversation that was somehow recorded. But through the centuries it's great for our male egos if Eve is made out to be the fall gal. At least for some male egos among us.

In Matthew's gospel text today we find that Christ is led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days following his Baptism by John in the Jordan River. Just as God declares Jesus as his beloved Son and states that people should listen to him, we find him all alone in the desert. Alone, in the desert, is where Jesus' ministry begins. Humble, isn't it?

His ministry begins in a desolate place, a harsh place to survive, even if you have food and water.

How can we look at this event as the beginning of his ministry if he is not among people who he would have hear the good news of our loving God? Well, in hind- sight, his ministry begins as he teaches all who would learn of this encounter an incredibly important lesson.

And what, pray tell, might this message be to us this day? The message Jesus is teaching us is not to fall for the traps the evil one sets for us. This is an age old message.

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden and Eve. The serpent, the tempter, muddles God's directions to Eve and suggests that he knows more than God and if Eve will just eat of the fruit of the tree of life, she will somehow know what God knows. And she and Adam quietly do what the serpent would have them do. No discussion, no come back, just blind obedience. They failed the test, the trap of doubt.

Back to Jesus in the wilderness. What is so different about this scene compared to the garden scene? Jesus, who hasn't eaten anything for 40 days, Jesus who is at his most vulnerable point in his life thus far, Jesus who was likely trying to make sense of exactly what his ministry and mission was all about, this Jesus dares to take on the evil one face to face, toe to toe.

Unlike Eve and Adam, Jesus does not take the evil one at face value. In whatever physical and mental state Jesus was in, he had the presence of mind to quote the scriptures he had learned as a boy. And if you notice, the evil one, the tempter, didn't argue with scripture. Not once. How could he? He thought his arguments would be enough to sway Jesus and bring him over to the "dark side."

He tried and tried and tried again, three times, and lost the battle each and every time. His temptations were not of the least interest to Jesus who knew that the only one to rely upon was his heavenly Father. He was not about to put that relationship to a test. That trust, that relationship was beyond compare. Nothing could bring that into question, not the evil one in the desert, not even the cross on Calvary.

Famished or not, Jesus knew God's love, mercy, compassion and providential care, and not only for him but for all who believe in him.

Matthew has the evil one simply exit the scene after he realizes he cannot trick, cannot tempt, the Son of God. And then, "suddenly angels came and waited on him." Jesus never waived and God prevailed.

Back to the garden. We know that the story ended differently with Adam and Eve. The tempter won that battle and the world changed forever. The evil one promised Eve that if she and Adam ate the fruit their eyes would be opened to supposedly see the world as God saw the world, but that was not the result. They were tricked by something that sounded too good to be true. And it was.

Their eyes were opened, but they did not see things as God saw them. Rather they saw things that they could not envision before they ate the fruit. Utopia was lost, gone forever. They had been scammed. Period.

However, we know that the Lord God did not abandon them. No, he came and set down new rules and regulations as to how life was to be lived. And as the world took on new meaning, it was obvious that he was still with us humans, still cared for us, loved us, would still nourish us and would forever have to call us back to him, back so that we would give him honor and glory for what he has done and continues to do for each of us.

So, you might ask what do these great stories of scripture have to do with our world and each of us today? And that is a very good question.

If we go back in world history to Germany under Hitler's reign of terror, we find that he, like the serpent in the garden of Eden, was a great tempter. His vision of what the world should look like was swallowed hook, line and sinker by a great majority of non-Jewish Germany and by Stalin and Mussolini.

And we find that the church, especially in Germany, Lutherans included, acted like Adam and Eve. They heard the promise of a supposed better world and jumped on board without saying

much. Now, there were certainly Germans who were against Hitler and his final solution. Many of them were casualties.

But the fact remains that Christians and people who sought justice did not rise up en masse and protest and devise a plan to end the murderous reign of Hitler. And yes, that might have been easier said than done, just ask Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but the fact remains that the world acted more like Eve than Jesus.

When segregation was in vogue in our nation, what were the vast majority of churches doing? Were they protesting the treatment of God's creatures in a way that made a difference? I'm certain that many local congregations heard sermons on the evils of segregation, and how black people were indeed children of God like white people. But did it affect an early and just outcome to the situation?

What's a person to do? Well, I'd like us to look at our texts today and understand that we cannot fight, we cannot stand up to temptation, if we are silent, if we don't have a response based upon scripture, based upon what we know of a loving and life-giving God. We must not succumb to doubting our faith, our knowledge of God.

What are we to do? We are to love our God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. How will that play out in our lives as we continue to live under God's sovereign rule? We all must make those decisions.

Thanks be to God.

Amen