

## The Story of the Fall

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the first Sunday in Lent, February 25, 1996. Scripture Lessons: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Listen to the story of one family. A man and a woman lived together happily. They lived in a paradise. They lived in perfect harmony with nature. They had all the resources they needed to live comfortably. They were both healthy. They never worried about what they'd eat or wear. They both had productive jobs. They worked hard but they enjoyed their work. It was work but it wasn't labor. They worked hard. They played hard. And they slept peacefully all night. They were very much in love with one another. They sat in the garden in the evening after a hard days work. <sup>The beauty of the flowers</sup> They listened to the birds singing. They new how to be relaxed with one another. They talked about what they'd done all day. They talked about the beauty of the paradise where they lived. They shared their most intimate thoughts and dreams for the future. Nothing was hidden from one another.

And they had an intimate relationship with God. God was real to them. They weren't at all embarassed about praying together. Their relationship to God was as joyful and intimate as their relationship to one another. They loved God. They both felt that God had put them where they were for a purpose. <sup>They had everything going for them.</sup> Then something inexplicable happened. Something happened that ruined their relationship to God. Their relationship of trust and love was shattered. And immediately their world began to fall apart. They began to fear and distrust God. They began

to avoid God. They began to find worship and praise more and more difficult although God continued to love them and longed to have the breach restored. As their relationship to God disintegrated, so did their relationship to one another. They began to hide more and more of their thoughts from one another. They began to be afraid of one another.

The husband feared that his wife would get angry with him if she knew everything that he thought and did and felt. He began to fear that his wife didn't like the way he looked. And the wife began to have the same kinds of fears. They remained married, but the intimacy they once enjoyed was never completely restored.

They were forced to leave their estate. They lost their jobs. They lost all their benefits and had to start life all over again. They found other work and they worked harder than ever, but no longer did they enjoy their work.

They decided to have children. Maybe they thought it would draw them closer together. It didn't work. They had two sons, one right after the other. The two brothers constantly fought with one another. Eventually jealousy led one of them to murder the other. He ran away from home and his parents never saw him again. <sup>His parents never stopped grieving the loss of their sons.</sup> ~~He spent the rest of his life running.~~

Within several generations the descendants of this ideal family created a culture of death: each generation got worse. Murder, lying, drugs, all kinds of sexual perversions, child abuse, spousal abuse, racism. And their relationship to God

became more and more distant. Their knowledge of God became more and more distorted and perverted. ~~There~~

Do I believe this story is true. Yes! How do I know it's true? Not from a study of geology. A study of geology tells us that death has always been present. Fossils of animals which lived and died millions of years ago are proof that death was in the world long before the first humans appeared. And anthropology<sup>finds evidence that many people believe</sup> traces humankind back a million year to primitive pre-human ancestors.

And yet I believe this story is true. This story shapes and affects what I believe about the human race and God. <sup>This story has shaped and affected all of western culture,</sup> ~~For~~ <sup>It's not the only story that explains how sin entered the world but it's the story I and no church believe</sup> ~~is most true,~~ <sup>example,</sup> This story claims that the whole human race is one extended family. This story destroys the idea of racial superiority. People who really believe this story know that all of us are related. People who really believe this story know that the very notion of race or of pure races is a myth. All of us are descendants of this original family.

This story claims that our basic and most serious problem is our relationship to God. The basic problem is not unemployment. Not poor education. Not poverty. The basic problem is our relationship to God. Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that if you believe in God all these other problems become insignificant. I believe that it's our responsibility as Christians and as citizens to address the problems of unemployment, poverty, war and education. <sup>(as often happens)</sup> But if we leave God out of the equation, a good job, a good marriage, a nice place to live, won't bring lasting happiness.

The church today faces the same temptations Adam and Eve faced; the same temptations Jesus faced. The church is so often tempted to offer hungry people nothing more than bread, while withholding from them the Bread of Life. We're tempted to offer nothing more than political solutions to the world's problems. We're tempted to offer gimmicks, rather than the Gospel.

But the story doesn't end with the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The story goes on to say that God has come to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the second Adam. Jesus was tempted and did not fall. His victory over temptation has won for Adam and all his descendants reconciliation with God. Through Jesus Christ - through his death and resurrection - God has restored what Adam lost.

This morning Jesus Christ offers us the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. Come to the Table in faith, believing that you are a child of Adam. Whether we're young or old, we're sinners who need what Jesus offers. Come to the Table in faith, repentance and love. Confess your sin and brokenness. Seek reconciliation with God and your neighbor. Trust in Jesus Christ for cleansing and renewal. Even one who doubts or whose trust is wavering may come to the Table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: O Lord, who has sent us out into all the world to make followers from every nation, help us to resist the temptations which you yourself have conquered. Keep us from offering to the hungry nothing but bread; from presenting proofs instead of a Person; and from serving the forces of this world in the hope that they will serve us, your messengers; through the power of your name. Amen.