

26 February 2023

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

For thousands of years, First Nations people have walked on this land – a relationship that is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. We are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the W̱SÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

PWS&D Message *Responding to Conflict-Induced Hunger*

Food insecurity around the world has many causes—including conflict. In fact, 77 million acutely food-insecure people live in countries where civil wars and religious persecution are the primary drivers of hunger.

Conflict disrupts markets, causing inflation and threatening the livelihoods of many people. Moreover, wars destroy food stockpiles and often force farmers to evacuate. As a result, people are pushed toward poverty, starvation and malnutrition.

PWS&D is responding to those in need due to conflict and hunger.

In Yemen, Ukraine, Syria and Ethiopia, to name a few conflict-afflicted places, families and individuals are receiving much needed food assistance through a combination of cash transfers, food baskets and food vouchers.

This assistance, made possible in large part through PWS&D's membership at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, ensures families have access to essential food items and helps them navigate the uncertainties they face.

This Lenten season, give thanks that you are able to help those displaced by conflict have enough food to strengthen them on the journey to find peace and security.

➤ *Let us build a house (verse 1)*

PWS&D Lenten Liturgy

Written by Jim Goring and the Rev. Ian Fraser (Pointe Claire, Quebec)

Just as the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness,

the Spirit sends us into places of uncertainty where we confront our weakness & insecurities.

In the wilderness, we, too, are confronted by our hunger and thirst.

We are tempted to grab at empty promises that offer an easy way out.

Like Jesus, we are tempted by power and prestige.

Unlike him, we often submit to their glamour.

We wonder whether God is with us.

We wonder whether we can trust God to take care of us.

We can only move forward in faith.

Let us stand on the cliff edge and, like Jesus, dare to trust.

➤ *Be still for the presence of the Lord*

† Gathering Prayer¹ / the Lord's Prayer / sung Words of Hope

God sovereign and generous, who commands the rise and fall of the nations, who calls and has chosen many peoples, who weeps when they harm each other, who haunts every local culture – including our own – with your will for well-being, who draws close to the powerless and surprises with power through weakness...

You are the one, whom we praise in astonishment, whom we adore in gladness, whom we thank in gratitude... for who you are, for what you do, for how you hope.

Look with mercy on us this day. Look with your mercy as we seek to obey you all the day long. In the name of Jesus who obeyed fully we boldly pray... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ *How deep the peace (repeat) – please remain seated*

† Prayer for Understanding

God of Life, send your Spirit to guide us as we listen to stories from scripture that may sound familiar. Speak your truth in ways that open our minds and hearts to a deeper understanding of your Living Word. Amen

Scripture **Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 [OT 2]**

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

¹ Adapted from Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven*, p. 10

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

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

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

So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Psalm 32 [The Inclusive Bible]

Happiness comes from having your rebellion taken away, from having your failure completely covered.

Happiness comes from Yahweh not counting your mistakes, from having nothing to hide.

As long as I kept my stubborn silence, my bones grew because of my constant complaints.

Day and night your hand was heavy upon me – my strength was sapped by a summer's heat.

Finally, I admitted my sin to you, and stopped hiding my guilt.

I said, "I confess my rebellion, Yahweh," and you took away the guilt of my sin.

That's why people of faith everywhere should pray to you – they'll find you. Even when the flood begins rising, it will never touch them.

You are my hiding place – you protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of freedom.

"I'll teach you and show you the way you should walk – I will counsel you and keep watch over you. Be wise! Don't be like horses and mules, who need to be harnessed with bit and bridle before they'll come to you."

Wrongdoers are prone to many sorrows, but those who trust in Yahweh are surrounded with unfailing love. Be glad in Yahweh and rejoice, you who love justice! Exult, you upright of heart!

Matthew 4: 1-11 [NT 3]

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

Sin is everywhere – everywhere in the readings for this week for sure – in many places throughout our world it seems – often in our personal lives as well. Disobedience and deceit, transgressions and trespass, judgment and condemnation, testing and temptation – sin abounds.

But what exactly is sin? There are many ideas on the topic – stacks of books written on the matter. We can use categories like the seven deadly sins. We can talk about mortal or

venial sins – major and minor sins. We can think of sin as a violation of personal morality – privatize it – or we can understand sin in collective ways. We can dismiss what was once thought to be sinful as illness or crime or institutional weakness.

According to *Living Faith*, sin is that which separates us from God – not caring for the world, not serving God's will, not living lives that reflect divine love, putting ourselves above God. It is a state of catastrophic disorder that places us at odds with God – it is the human condition. Evidence of this disorder surrounds us and fills us, but we strive to ignore that evidence. We keep looking for ways to improve our lives without dealing with God, but we can't do it.

The biblical narrative of *Adam and Eve in the Garden* is largely about the relationship between humanity and God – about dealing with God. It is one of the best-known passages in the Old Testament, perhaps even in the entire Bible. Unfortunately, it is also easily misunderstood and misinterpreted.

The narrative itself has usually taken a back seat to the broader debates concerning the historical origin of sin in the world, the incapability of human beings to do good, and the historical reliability and accuracy of the details of the account. The story, with which we are so familiar, has lost its freshness and vitality – lost its ability to grip us with its message about God and humanity and how we risk becoming separated from the divine.

If we could suspend, for a moment, what we think this passage is supposed to mean, perhaps we could regain the power of the story itself and hear its message anew. If we listen, this is a story that pulls us into it – helps us see ourselves, and God, in a new light.

This is a story about who God is, who we are as human beings in God's world, how we respond to God, and how God responds to us. It is a story about the human condition – a story about us – a story that confronts us with who we are in relation to God. Perhaps in it you will see yourself standing before the forbidden tree – torn between God's desire for creation and the creature's desire to follow another path.

It has been suggested that these verses contain what might be called the contract of employment between God and humanity. God hands to humanity the task of tending and guarding the garden. The remuneration is the fruit of which the garden abounds and only one tree in the middle – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – is out of bounds. Humanity is confronted with a choice: to work for God and find happiness and freedom in serving God or to go its own way and live with the inevitable consequences. This fundamental choice faces us all: between God and ourselves – between real freedom and

the illusion of it – between Paradise and Hell – between life and death. It is our choice as we are faced with the temptation “to be like God” – to usurp God’s prerogative.

In the first three chapters of Genesis, we have two different accounts of creation – they come from different sources and stress different images. It is as much of a mistake to focus too much on those differences as it is to try to collapse them into one story. The community of faith has placed these two stories together in the canon, so we must hear them together.

First, we need to remind ourselves of some important points from the creation story of chapter one – God as creator. This account is a bold and powerful statement of faith declaring that God alone is Creator. God controls the cycles of nature – calms the raging deep – brings order and stability to the world. Creation is deliberate and purposeful, willfully done by God alone. The entire account describes God as setting boundaries and limits on creation. Boundaries are set between light and dark, between waters above and below, between sea and dry land. These two concepts, seeing the world in terms of either order or chaos and seeing God as the Creator who sustains the world by setting limits and boundaries in divine creation, are crucial as background for understanding the second story of creation.

While the first creation story focused on God it quickly becomes apparent that humanity is the concern of this second creation story. It describes how relationships are broken by the deliberate disobedience of the human creatures to whom God has given exclusive but limited oversight of the garden.

The *adam* – earth creature – humanity – is to care for and keep the world in which God has placed them. Humanity is expected to share in God’s work in the world. Creation is seen as the direct work of God and is therefore good.

The earth creature is given permission to eat freely of any tree in the garden. Humanity is given freedom to live in God’s world, to carry on the activities necessary to maintain life. But this freedom is not absolute. There is a limit – one tree from which they may not eat. Here the idea of boundaries, emphasized earlier, is again brought forward. Just as boundaries exist to define the physical world, so boundaries exist to define human existence in God’s world.

Enter the crafty serpent... There have been so many interpretations of this part of the story that it is easy to lose our way amid the clutter of speculation and theories. One of the most common interpretations is to identify the serpent with the devil or Satan.

But that is not what the scripture says. In fact, nowhere in the Old Testament is such identification made.

The focus of this story is not on the serpent and its trickery but on the man and the woman – the earth creatures. They are at the center of the story seeking to blame the serpent's trickery and temptation for humanity's disobedience. The creature defies the Creator and then wants to shift the blame away from themselves – away from us. It is easier to externalize blame for decisions – attitudes and actions that separate us from God – to someone or something else rather than to take responsibility ourselves. *"The flesh is weak." "Society is to blame." "I was overwhelmed by circumstances." "It really wasn't so bad." "The devil made me do it."*

The earth creatures in the garden now stand outside the boundaries of God's purpose and have taken life itself into their own hands. They knew the order God had established in the world – knew the penalty for violating it – yet they willfully chose to act contrary to it. The choice between good and evil – right and wrong – creativity and destructiveness – is always ours to make. Ours too is the responsibility for making choices and being accountable for the consequences.

This story is not so much about the origins of evil but the consequences of acting in ways that do not honour God's divine creation. The consequence of putting ourselves above God – not caring for the world as God intends – crossing the boundaries of creation set out by the divine is sin. It is our perversion of God's gift of freedom – the grasping for more than we need or are entitled to – the refusal to turn away from our self-centered desires. Immediately humanity's well-ordered harmonious world begins to disintegrate. There is no more talk of tending the garden. There is no more walking with God in the garden. There is only mistrust, blame, guilt, and alienation.

At one point the earth creatures are described as naked and unashamed, but now their nakedness causes distress. They have crossed the boundary of God's established order. Nakedness in the story becomes a powerful symbol for the shame and guilt of disobedience. The attempt to cover their nakedness with crude garments of leaves depicts the feeble and futile efforts of humanity to address the guilt of sin on its own.

As the story continues in Genesis from our reading this morning, a widening circle of disruption caused by disobedience is described. The people find that they have lost the capacity to relate to God in the way they did before. Their shame and guilt cause them to try to hide from God – naked and ashamed on the wrong side of the boundary!

This separation from God – sin – is unsettling – how can the situation be resolved – the relationship restored? God’s forgiveness is the profound affirmation of the nature of God. God responds to disobedience with mercy and grace! God bridges the gap – makes a way when there is no way. Sin abounds – it’s true – but God’s grace overflows even more! Thanks be to God.

➤ *Lord Jesus, who through forty days* *200*

Offering and Prayer *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* *306*

God has given us so many gifts in Christ and in creation. We offer our gifts in gratitude for the possibilities we enjoy, trusting God to multiply what we bring for goodness’ sake.

Holy One, we offer our gifts in thanksgiving for all the goodness you provide. Bless our gifts and our lives so that we become a source of blessing for others, in the name of Jesus, our strength and our hope. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

Almighty God, we stand before you stripped of all pretence and pride. If we have anything to boast about, anything to be thankful for, it is your grace. Whatever gifts and goodness we have comes from you.

Lord Jesus, you refused to turn stones into bread. Save us from using our power, however little, to satisfy the demands of selfishness in the face of the needs of others.

You refused to leap from the temple top. Save us from displaying our skills – however modest – to win instant popularity in the face of nobler calls on our abilities.

O Lord, you refused to bend the knee to a false god. Save us from offering our devotion, however weak, to cheap or easy religion in the face of the harder path on which you bid us to follow you.

Jesus, as we turn to seek God’s will we come face to face with the many needs in our world and in our community. Hear our silent prayers as we lift before you the concerns for others that weigh most heavily upon us at this time...

Use us, O God, to bring comfort to those who mourn – wholeness to those who are sick – companionship to those who are lonely – the bread of life to the hungry – and the cup of salvation to the oppressed. Help us to give from the abundance you bestow, so that others may abound in your promise of new life. Strengthen us as we pray. **Amen**

Blessing

Strengthened by the word of God as your spiritual food, and prayer as your spiritual exercise, dare to go into the world, loving God and one another. May the grace of the risen Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Bless the Lord*** (*repeat*)