

Series: First Family

Sermon: “Strange Fruit”

Scripture: Genesis 2:8-9; 15-17; 3:4-6

8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 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 surely die.”

3 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 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 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.

[PRAYER]: Father, we know that all our flesh and glory are grass and flowers which fade and fall, but your Word endures forever. So, find us here, at the point where the frailty of humanity and the fullness of divinity meet in Christ Jesus our Lord, and send your Spirit to grant us true delight in wisdom, that we might grow up into the fullness of him who dwells with us in the flesh. Amen.

[INTRO]:

- I. The Landscape of Desire
- II. The Grasping Nature of Sin
- III. Strange Fruit on a Dead Tree

I. The Landscape of Desire

1. “The world was created as the ‘matter,’ the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.” – Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*
 - a. Everything you encounter was created as an occasion for you to meet with God and receive from and respond to Him. Genesis 2 and 3 are written to express this truth with rich imagery.

⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... ¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

2. Life and Wisdom in the center of Eden (Delight).
 - a. World, Eden, Garden, Center
 - b. The center of Eden is the peak of a mountain; rivers cascading down to water the earth
 - c. Shaped like the Temple Mount - Sacred places we go to encounter God.
 - d. Filled with Trees... What's the deal with trees?
 - i. Appetites, Ambitions, Approval
 1. The things we desire and take delight in when we receive
3. Trees of Life - THE Tree, but also other trees of life. Anything can be a tree of life.
 - a. Our life is made of everything that comes to us that we receive. “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7).
4. Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – Interchangeable with Wisdom –
 - a. Wisdom is in waiting. A desirable thing, not “no,” but “not yet.”
 - b. He will not withhold any good thing, but it may not be the fullness of time for it.
 - i. There is maturity that must take place. (From grapes to wine.)
 - ii. Wise as a serpent and yet innocent as a dove.
5. Wisdom Literature pick up on these themes big time:
 - a. Proverbs 3 - ⁵ *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. ¹³ Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding... ¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her - those who hold her fast are called blessed.*
 - b. Psalm 37 - ³ *Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴ Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him*
6. Word, sacrament, and prayer – Learning to trust in the provision of God’s good gifts in his time, within the sacred spaces of covenant community. Bringing our desires to the midst of the garden.

II. The Grasping Nature of Sin

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ 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 surely die.”

1. In the Bible, testing is not about proving something but about revealing something. Less academic and more medical. What’s being revealed here?
2. Every good thing in my life is an equal opportunity for evil. It represents a choice:
 - a. Will I receive what good I have been given, or will I grasp for the ungiven goods?
 - i. Is this fruit from a tree of life that I should receive & give thanks for;
 - ii. wisdom that needs waiting, to allow my desire and its object to mature?

⁶ 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.

The Nature of Sin is grasping for ungiven goodness:

1. Appetite – “good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes,”
2. Ambition – “to be desired to make one wise”
3. Approval – “her husband who was with her”

Those things feel reasonable! No one ever feels like they’re being unreasonable!

*“True wisdom must be acquired through a process, generally from instruction by those who are wise. The fall is defined by the fact that Adam and Eve acquired wisdom illegitimately, thus trying to take God’s role for themselves rather than eventually joining God in his role as they were taught wisdom and became the fully functional vice regents of God involved in the process of bringing order.” - John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve**

- I wish I could have been there to say to them both do you really think he would withhold any good thing? Does God not want us to know good and evil? Did he want to keep us in a state of ignorance? Or is wisdom just a gift that takes time to receive? Is the attempt to grasp it a forfeiture of the very first gift – the gift of a receiving posture?

1 Corinthians 10:13 - *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.*

- a. Appetites in order to cope with the incredible stress that faces us?
- b. Approval from others, insisting that they affirm your positions?
- c. Ambition, sacrificing ordinary faithfulness to get ahead while the getting is good?

Consequences would be a whole other sermon, but let me say this:

1. Adam, poor sod, was given dominion over the animals, but he submitted to the serpent.
2. “Tree of the knowledge of Good and evil,” as “The School of Hard Knocks.”
3. *“The knowledge of good. That half of the primal catastrophe received too little attention.” – MR, Jack*

*“Authentic human existence... aspires to realize its full potential of godlikeness while consistently acknowledging its creatureliness and limitations. Sin is... humanity failing to reflect its divine calling, humanity forgetting its limitations.” - Mark E. Biddle, *Missing the Mark**

III. Strange Fruit on a Dead Tree

1. The seed, and the testing of mountain men – Those who encounter God on his holy mounts
 - a. Abraham of Mt. Moriah was a grasper

- b. Moses of Mt. Sinai - grasper
 - c. David of Zion – grasper.

- 2. Matthew 4 – The first Adam failed in the Garden and was sent to the wilderness, The Second Adam then succeeded in the wilderness and restored us to the garden:
 - a. He waited on God, just revealing who he is.
 - i. Appetite, - man shall not not live by bread alone
 - ii. approval - you shall not put the Lord your God to the test
 - iii. ambition - you shall worship the Lord Your God and him only

 - b. Phil 2 – did not consider equality with God an thing to be grasped.

- 2. Romans 5: ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.
 - a. Does that mean we're supposed to be passive? What a wise question.
 - i. No. Gethsemane Garden – Active asking and active waiting. We ask for everything our heart desires, and then we *receive* what is *given*. And we trust. Can I do that?

 - b. Christ not only acquired what Adam lost but also what Adam, in the way of obedience, would have gained. - Bavinck, RD 2, 543

- 3. Strange fruit on a Dead Tree
 - a. late 1930's, a Billie Holiday “strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.”
 - b. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, theologian James Cone - in the historic lynchings of America we have perhaps the most effective analogue available to the modern world for the horror of crucifixion.
 - c. Calvary's tree and strange fruit of the seed.
 - i. We can look upon this one image and know both good and evil.
 - ii. The knowledge of the good that was lost and the evil he destroyed become, in their proper time, a gift that only waiting could give.
 - iii. We receive profound wisdom in this strange fruit. And it's not forbidden -
 - 1. He says, take, eat and drink of me, This is my body and my blood, the firstfruits of God's gifts. I give my life for yours.
 - 2. And somehow, even calvary's cross becomes a tree of life.
 - 3. So let us let us again receive life from him.