

“Take; Eat”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
March 1, 2020**

New Testament Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

At Oxford University many years ago, students were taking the final exam for a philosophy course. The professor told the students there would be just one question on the exam. As he handed out the examination booklets, the students learned the question was simplicity itself, just three words: “What is courage?”

They opened their booklets and began to write. Five minutes into the exam, they were surprised to see one of their fellow students scribble a few words, get up, hand the professor his answer and leave the room.

Later they learned he had received an “A” on the exam. His answer was just three words. Do you want to know the three words with which he answered the question, “What is courage?” All for his answer is he wrote was: “This is courage.” Courage, indeed. What did that student show his professor by turning in a final exam with just three words on it? The answer: Trust. The student had the courage to trust that his answer would be enough.

Trust is at the center of the Old Testament scripture we heard read today. Our trust of God, God’s trust of us, and the testing of that trust by something that is not God and not us, testing by the serpent.

In the order of creation, the serpent is somewhere between God and us. The serpent knows more than any other wild animal. Genesis tells us that the serpent is “more crafty than any ... animal that the Lord God had made.”

We see this craftiness when Adam and Eve are told by God to “freely eat of every tree” except one; if they eat from that tree, they shall die. And the serpent says 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.” This puts Adam and Eve in quite a dilemma. Who to trust?

If they trust God, they get to live and work and freely eat and enjoy all that God has given them—simplicity itself. If they trust the serpent, they get a little more. And isn’t getting more always better? No.

Oh, we tend to think it is. We think it's better to have more – more money, more food, bigger portions, just a few more minutes online, gaming or watching TV. These and other temptations are so ingrained in our society! We become slaves to our tech devices, our nice houses, our desire to have more money, more to eat, more ... whatever. It's hard to know when we've had enough, isn't it?

Well, God knows what's enough. God knows we need food to live, tools to do our work and even technology to stay connect with friends and family. But there's a difference between what we need and what we want.

This is the first Sunday of Lent, a great time to begin discovering the difference between what you need and what you want. Many people pick one thing to give up between now and Easter. This can give you real insight into who or what is really running your life, and what it is to be free to live as God intended.

From the very beginning, God intended that we live in paradise, the Garden of Eden. God placed us in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. This means we were made to work and to enjoy the fruits of our labor, not to be enslaved by our jobs and over our heads in bills.

We were given all we need to live, but of course we wanted more. As soon as we saw there was something we couldn't have, we wanted it. First it was the forbidden fruit and then it was God-like knowledge, to know the mind of God.

As soon as the serpent – who seemed to know more than we did – as soon as the serpent dared to question God's word, saying, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat (the forbidden fruit), your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...", as soon as we heard that, well, we wanted it all. We wanted the forbidden fruit, so that we could know it all and be in charge. And at that moment, we stopped fully trusting in God. And that is how we live today – constantly wondering who to trust.

Thankfully, God sent us one who is trustworthy and true, the one who said, "Trust in God, trust also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house." In other words, there's a place for you along side me. Jesus, trustworthy and true.

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Interesting that we started out in the garden with God saying about the forbidden fruit, "you shall not eat" or you will die.

And here we are amid a troubled world with Jesus saying, "Take and eat; this is my body, which is broken for you," that you might live.

It's just like what Elizabeth read in First Corinthians this morning. "... As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ... Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."

We can belong to Christ – we can give ourselves to Christ – or we can belong to the world, give ourselves to temptation, greed, envy, lust. This is our opportunity – your opportunity – to gain insight into those areas of life that are out of control for you, where the blessings of God elude you.

For example, there was a group of health-club members asked to share with one another the truth about their daily routines. As they went around the circle, each member admitted to their excesses, until they came to one member who was obviously overweight. Taking his turn, he said, “I eat moderately, I drink moderately, and I exercise frequently.” “Hmm?” said the manager. “Are you sure you having nothing else to add?” “Well, yes,” said the member. “I lie extensively.”

Now that’s great insight into ones own character. Which begs the question, what do you really know – and admit – about yourself, about that out-of-control area of your life? Think about it. Where do you overindulge? Or what are you holding back?

This is your opportunity to pick something to give up or something to take on as a teaching moment this Lent, as a way of gaining wisdom – not by taking more – but by giving up, giving that part of yourself over to God.

If you’re not sure what area of life you could focus on for greater insight – greater wisdom – here’s a way to discover it. After eating the forbidden fruit and discovering their nakedness for all to see. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to hide that part of themselves. What part of your life are you hiding?

Whatever it is, chances are there’s something going on there that represents either an overindulgence or something you’re holding back. Use this first week of Lent to examine that area of life, and then decide what you will give up or take on as a way to gain greater knowledge, greater knowledge of yourself and your God. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, as we begin our Lenten journey, the cross of Jesus Christ is ever before us. That you have taken this symbol of humiliation, weakness and death and turned it into a symbol of hope, strength and resurrection – this is testimony to your desire to redeem all creation.

We trust and believe in your power to work all things for your good and holy purposes.

We ask your comfort and healing Spirit on all those we keep in prayer.

We ask your Spirit of joy and love upon Ellie and Brian as they prepare for a long and happy life together in marriage.

You alone, Lord, know our every need and come to us in our times of struggle and sorrow and in times of joy and promise.

Thank you for being with us now in this time of worship, as we raise our eyes to heaven and our voice in song, singing the prayer that you taught us.

**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 forever. Amen.**