

In the Garden

“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’”

This Sunday we will hear a story of Adam and Eve. Like many of our most profound scriptures, the power of humanity’s first brush with temptation and their separation from God in the garden has been buried under the haze of familiarity. And worse—I’m afraid that its power has been lost to bad or thoughtless teaching from the Church.

But today, let’s throw off all of those horrible images from art of Angel’s with swords of fire acting as God’s holy bouncers---casting Adam and Eve out into the hard reality of life after the beauty of Eden.

Let’s try to suspend the thought that human toil and misery was God’s punishment for humankind’s first failure. Let’s even take the risk of believing that far from being vengeful, God’s heart was breaking as God witnessed the loss of humankind’s innocence and gazed in horror as shame came to be one of our closest companions. God did not create a punishment of leaving Eden, Scripture is just describing the reality of life and suffering after innocence has been lost.

What a horrible moment for God when God’s heart turns to embrace and celebrate with those whom he so lovingly created and gave life, only to find that something dark and sinister had crept into their hearts and that they were afraid of their loving creator. The foundations of the earth must have trembled when humanity first hid their hearts from God’s all-embracing love.

In those few indiscreet moments of giving in to temptation, Adam and Eve’s innocence was shattered. When humankind first chose to place a barrier between them and God, a relationship that was once whole and pure became deformed and they fell into fear.

There is that word again...fear. God knew that now that their innocence was lost and that they lived in fear, the joys of Eden were lost to them as well. I’m not so sure that those famous curses that followed Adam and Eve’s confession are punishment so much as God simply and sadly detailing what the world feels like when we live out of fear and shame. You see, what we forget is that *God in fact made* this crafty serpent that we have turned into the bad guy of the piece, but it was humankind that created fear and shame.

God’s deepest intention is that we all know joy and know it completely. God calls us to return to the innocence of believing that the world is good and that we, as God’s beloved, are God’s very delight. I think God calls us to banish shame and fear. In so doing, all of the darkness and pain we carry around can spill out into Christ’s loving light and be transformed into what might just become the very best parts of us. This is the power of God.

We can do this healing, spiritual work at any time. Claim God’s endless season of mercy and restoration, and just lay all of your stuff at God’s feet.

Let's just lay all of our garbage out on the table and see what God does with it! Once we do this I promise you we will feel liberated and free. And once we are liberated and free, who knows where this new life might lead us? Imagine this: It might just lead us straight back to our own innocence; an innocence that also knows the sadness and sorrow of life, but refuses to feel shamed at our failures, and give up once and for all the notion that God does anything but LOVE us. This is a life in which we can love God and embrace life without fear or shame or anything that is keeping us from the joy of God. Live God's eternal life here. Live God's eternal life now, on this side of paradise.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+