

AT FIRST SIGHT - FORBIDDEN FRUIT
A SERMON BASED ON GENESIS 3:1-24
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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10:00 a.m.

I remember being shocked at the realization.

There are two trees in the centre of the garden of Eden.

Two. Two trees.

We have spent the great majority of our time looking at one tree.

Theologians through the centuries have focussed their attention on
the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It was fruit from the tree of the knowledge and good evil,
that God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat.

That is the tree that gets painted by the renaissance painters.

It is the fruit of this tree that the serpent makes attractive to Eve.

‘God knows when you eat of it,

your eyes will be opened and you will be like God,
knowing good and evil.’

This is the tree under which we see Adam and Eve

sharing the fruit.

This is the tree which produces the fruit
that ruins Adam and Eve.

If you are hanging out with a Bible snob,

they will enjoy making the point of telling you that no where
does it say it was an apple, just fruit.

Personally, I'm going to go with persimmons,
because I believe that to be the nastiest fruit
I've come across.

It is this tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
through which sin is introduced into the world.

It is this tree that gets theologians talking about original sin,
and the unraveling of humanity.

When Adam and Eve actually eat the fruit of this tree,
it gets labelled the Fall.

This is when everything all came apart.

This tree.

If only Adam and Even hadn't eaten the persimmon,
if only they hadn't eaten the fruit of that tree,
humanity would not have been kicked out of paradise.

This tree of the knowledge of good and evil gets,
and has gotten so much attention
that I am shamed to admit that I honestly forgot
that this is another tree in the centre of the garden.
There are two trees in the centre of the garden.

I was so busy looking at the one tree,
I didn't see the other one.

The Tree of Life is there.

Right there in Genesis 2:9

“In the middle of the garden were the tree of life
and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Fruit from The Tree of Life was not forbidden eating.

Adam and Eve had the option to eat from the tree of life.

Mango.

They had a selection.

A choice.

God said stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

He said, 'If you eat of it you will die.'

But there was no restriction on the tree of life.

They had a choice between these two trees.

It was the serpent in today's Scripture who asked,

'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'

What did God actually say?

The woman in the garden remembered it half right.

'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden.'

But God did actually say,

'You must not eat fruit from the tree

that is in the middle of the garden,

and you must not touch it,

for you will surely die.'?

What did God say?

Did God really say, 'You must not touch it.'?

If you back up a chapter,
you will see,
God didn't actually say that.

What God actually said was,
'You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
for when you eat of it, *when* you eat of it,
you will surely die.

The serpent didn't know what God said.

Or else it heard what it wanted to hear.

The woman didn't correctly remember what God said.

And it is here, at this point, very early in the Bible,
that we read and overhear the Bible's first conversation
not with God,
not even words to God
but instead a conversation about God, without God.

It is the first theological conversation.

It is a conversation about what God might have said,
what one thinks God would say,

what one believes God should say.

Notice however, God is not invited into the conversation.

When God first spoke, he gave permission.

Wide ranging, incredible freedom and permission.

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.

Free to eat from any tree in this extensive and beautiful garden.

In this house, you have fridge privileges,

open it whenever you want

and help yourself to whatever you want to eat.

Cold drinks are in the garage.

There are extra towels in the linen cupboard.

Help yourself.

Just don't take anything out of the fruit cellar.

We are worried some of our canning has spoiled.

We don't trust what it'll do to you.

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.

But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
for when you eat of it, it won't be good for you.
You will surely die.

After centuries of theology,
and talking about God instead of to God,
we still haven't seen the other tree in the garden.
We will hear God saying "If you eat from that tree,
I will punish you with death."
But is that what God said?

When the kids were little I told them.
Do not run into the street.
You'll get hit by a car.
I did not say to them,
if you run into the street I will hit you with a car.
I told the kids.
Do not put your hands near the stove.
You will get burned.
I did not say to them,

if you put your hands near the stove I will burn them.

I spoke a warning and named a consequence.

Why is it that we don't hear God doing the same?

God said, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden.

Any tree.

The whole garden.

But don't eat the fruit from that one.

It will kill you.

Not, I will kill you.

But, if you eat that fruit you will surely die.

It's right up there with brussel sprouts and turnip.

They will kill you.

So what God gave as a boundary,

because of a game of talking

or a panel of experts analyzing what God said,

or what he was thought to have said,

or what he was heard to have said,

instead of speaking with God or to God
what God gave as a boundary,
somehow became a threat.

Don't test me in this.

Don't make me tell you twice.

Don't you even think of going there.

Is that what God said?

What God had set up as a boundary to protect, became a barrier,
It was the theological arrogance,
exemplified by the serpent that redefined what we thought.

'What did God really say?'

'What would God do?'

'What would my God say?'

Then, as well as a theological problem,

there is the motivation problem.

We often want what we can't have,

or what we don't have, or what we shouldn't have.

Then we feel denied and excluded if there is a boundary
keeping us away,
even if it is keeping us safe.

And so with bad theology and unchecked motivations,
we decide that God is restrictive.

That God is a killjoy.

That God is holding back the good stuff.

We decide that God is repressive and oppressive.

That God limits freedom.

That God is controlling.

We start thinking we need to break free
from God's controlling ways.

Don't fence me in God.

I need to get out and find myself.

I need to break free and have some fun.

I need to a self determine and eat the fruit of my own choosing.

I'll decide for myself what is good and evil.

In a rush of ignorance and arrogance,

in a bold lack of humility,
and in the absence of teachability,
We hear what we want to hear.
Which isn't what was said at all.

In fact, most often when you hear others talk
about this passage in the Bible,
you will hear it explained only as what God says not to do.

Much of what we believe about God,
has to do with what we aren't allowed to do.
To be fair to God,
the church typically hasn't really clarified this.
We have believed that God said, don't!
People are nervous around the church,
and church people.
They aren't sure what they are allowed
or not allowed to do.

Is someone going to cluck their tongue at me?

Will I be judged?

Is that something I'm not supposed to do?

What about my past?

What about the part of me I haven't named out loud?

What about the fact that I don't have a clue how any of this

Christian religion stuff works?

So many preachers over the years have spoken

about what God said not to do.

Don't eat from that tree.

There has been endless ruminating

about what the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil even is.

We're still talking about that one.

The one thing God fenced.

That's the thing we most want to talk about.

But there are two trees.

All I know is, when you look at what God said,

there was no restriction on eating from any tree in the garden

even the tree of life.

There was permission.

God said,

You are free.

Any tree in the garden.

There is permission.

Do you see why this is so significant?

When you think about God,

what do you think God says?

What motives do you ascribe to God?

What have you decided motivates God?

Where do you place the heart of God?

Is God the great puppeteer in the sky?

Pulling your strings.

Putting on a show for his own entertainment?

Is God the rock star on the stage?

Looking to hear the roar of the crowd.

Listening for the masses to sing his song?

What motives do you ascribe to God?

Is God the strict teacher in the classroom?

Wanting control at all times?

Smashing the pointer down on the desk

and scaring the bejeebers

out of any who weren't paying attention?

Is God the military commander,

executing strategies

in order to bring the whole world into conformity

and under his command?

The ultimate empire.

Is that what God is talking about?

Is that what God said?

In talking about God

instead of talking with God or to God,

the woman and the man lost track of God's free invitation

to enjoy the entire garden.

God's warning about the one tree was lost.

Lost to a belief that there was something more,
and something better,
and that God was restricting them,
and holding them back.

There was no electric fence and barbed wire around the tree.

They were no one's puppets.

They were free to choose.

Eve walked right over the boundary.

Ate the fruit.

Offered it to Adam.

He heard what he wanted to hear and ate it too.

When they ate the fruit, they saw themselves,

saw what crossing the line did to them.

Saw what ignorance and arrogance achieves.

They saw themselves with shame.

They saw themselves naked and needing to cover up,

to conceal
to pull the curtains
to hide.

When they heard God next,
when God was walking in the garden
in the cool of the day,
in their shame, they hid from God.
They had to hide in the garden.
Hide in that very place where they had been free.

What do you think God said to them?

What do you think God should have said to them?

Words of anger?

Words of judgement?

Words of frustration?

What he said was,

'Where are you?'

'Where are you?'

When he found them, he clothed them.

What do you hear God saying?

Because what God wants,

what God is looking for is you.

What God wants for you is the freedom of life.

Free from the lock-down that gets happens
when you cross the lines and the boundaries.

Free from the hiding that feels necessary

because of the resulting shame that comes
when you realize what you've done.

God is looking for you to be free from the tyranny

of thinking God wants to restrict you and punish you
rather than bless you and guard you and give you life.

God is the God who says, any tree in the garden.

God is the God who says,

'Where are you?' and puts clothes on your back.

God wants you to come back.

It is interesting to note that at the end of the Bible,

there is only one tree mentioned.

It's talked about in the book of Revelation.

The passage goes like this.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life,

as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life,

bearing twelve crops of fruit,

yielding its fruit every month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be any curse.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city,

and his servants will serve him.

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night.

They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun,

for the Lord God will give them light.

And they will reign for ever and ever.”

That’s the direction God wants to take us.

In everyday living you will have choices.

There are things that will be in front of you

that at first sight may seem to be the more desirable choice.

That at first sight may suggest we are being denied,

and restricted and contained.

Especially if God has put a fence around it.

But there is another choice.

There is another tree.

And actually, at the end of the story there is only one tree.

Choose the tree of life.

Choose to hear God and listen to God and to do what he says.

At the end of your story

what God wants for you,

is life.

Don’t let anyone tell you different. Amen.