

February 22, 2026
1 Lent, Year A
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Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

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."

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.

A few weeks the Rev. Nicole talked about dreams and listed some of the familiar recurring dreams that many of us have. Not being prepared for an exam. Another one about your teeth falling out. My recurring dream is about falling. I am notoriously afraid of heights, which doesn't help ease my subconscious, so by day I try to stay away from ladders, the side of cliffs, ski chairs lifts (the worst) and very tall buildings.

Fear of falling. I had to look it up. What I got back was this: "dreaming of falling typically symbolizes feelings of insecurity, loss of control, or overwhelming stress in your waking life, often acting as a sign of inner turmoil that requires attention. It is a common, often frightening dream that can reflect anxiety regarding work, relationships, or life changes." Well, that's not good!

The phrase "The Fall" describes what happened in the story in Genesis we heard this morning to begin our Lenten season. Genesis 3 is actually the second version of creation. The first version – how God created the heavens and the earth, all living creatures, and male and female in God's image – all in six days allow for a day of rest – that take precedes the Garden of Eden.

The garden story is embedded in our history, culture and language. The scene is prevalent in art. Those who have never entered a church or read the Bible have heard about Adam and Eve. How Eve was formed from rib of Adam, and how the serpent tempted them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One of the most recognizable global corporate logos of all time – the apple from Apple computers and I-phone – has a bite out of one side. Though the Bible never actually says it was an apple that they ate. My vote was a mango or pomegranate or fig. From this paradise and garden, we inherited the idea of the fall of humanity and Original Sin.

Noted author Karen Armstrong and other scholars blame St. Augustine of the 5th century for promoting the notion that the sin of Adam continued its march through the human condition even

after the death and resurrection of Christ. She comments that Augustine's worldview was shaped by all of the violence and chaos he lived through – the fall of the Roman Empire and the many provinces in Northern Africa. He was an ethnic Berber and self-identified as a "Roman African" and lived most of his life in modern day Algeria and Tunisia.

The guilt of original sin – according to his interpretation – was transmitted to Adam's descendants when God was forgotten and men and women reveled in one another. Armstrong writes that "neither the Jews nor the Greek Orthodox subscribed to this tragic version." (pg. 127 *The Bible: A Biography*).

As Episcopalians and Anglicans, we have inherited the legacy of the Fall. It is one of the reasons we are still trying to wipe away and blot out the stain of sin. It is both legacy and baggage. Yet, as flawed as Augustine's take might have been, we still know what it feels like to live with temptations and testing that, if not negotiated well, will impact our relationship with others around us. We too may find ourselves out in the cold or distant because of what we do or fail to do.

Today we prayed: come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations. How do we deal with, respond and cope with our many tests, trials and temptations? This Genesis creation populated by humans begins with temptation. And in the prayer that we pray most often, the Lord's prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, or in another version of the Lord's Prayer: "save us from the time of trial."

Every Lent starts in the wilderness where the temptations are clear. For forty days and nights Jesus was tempted by the devil: he was hungry, thirsty and tired. Stones into bread could have been food. Jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple would have challenged flight and physics. Being given power to rule would have challenged the kind of messiah he would be.

It can seem that our greatest testing comes when we are most vulnerable, most alone, confused, tired, depressed, rejected, and when the world tells us that we have failed to measure up. These are often the voices we hear rather than stones or bread or pinnacles of temples.

The work of faith – and the special attention we give to it during Lent – is to see how God sustains us in the wilderness times. Sooner or later, we will all face times of loneliness and hardship. When life does not come together as planned or hoped for. When we feel like we've let people down, and no one could possibly understand what we are feeling or going through.

This is where and when and why we have faith in a God who is known through his Son. Christ was tempted as we are yet did not sin.

Can we avoid times of trial? Can we just bypass the wilderness? I don't see how.

With the piles of snow outside our windows, it recalls to me the phrase "the snowball effect" – how one small event can build and build and get larger and larger. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, things in life can gain speed and momentum and can be hard to stop.

There was a French playwright named Victorien Sardou who tells a story about a stuffy dinner party he attended when he accidentally knocked over his glass of wine. The woman next to him sprinkled salt on the stain in the tablecloth. The playwright tossed some of the salt over his shoulder to ward

off bad luck. (My grandmother used to do the same thing!) The salt hit the butler in the eye. The butler rubbed his eyes and dropped the platter of chicken on the floor. Of course, the family dog started eating the chicken and choked on a bone. (the same thing happened to my childhood dog – given a chicken bone by the same grandmother who would sprinkle that salt!) Someone tried to loosen the bone from the dog’s mouth. The dog bit his finger. The finger had to be amputated. The moral of this real or fictional dinner party was that everything changed when one glass was knocked over.

Life can feel that way.

We often hear this when we provide meals for our longest running outreach partnership with Seacoast Family Promise. One unplanned car repair, a flat tire, one missed payment can cause a whole family to lose their housing. Once lost, it is hard to get back.

Testing and trials can also come when it seems like everything is going just fine – as in the case of Adam and Eve in the paradise -- when we are not tired, hungry and thirsty. Our Eden may be our life of relative comfort and prosperity, privilege, blessings and abundance. When the tide is up and not out.

In good times and in tough times, in gardens and in deserts -- the message of the hope of salvation is the same. That is – at its heart – what “The Fall” was meant to express. There is a distance, a space, between God and us that Christ can alone fill. That is the heart of Christianity. And it may take a lifetime to figure out for us that this hope is really all about.

So, we are to be careful. Be wise. Listen to God. God said: you can eat from any tree but not that one. Maybe we cannot have it all after all. We have to make choices and at time sacrifices for the common good.

On Ash Wednesday, we read these profound words from St. Paul to the church in Corinth. “We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. We are treated as impostors and yet are true; as unknown and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We can get beaten down, discouraged, held back, shamed judged. We are alive though. We may not be counted among the growing class of billionaires that seem to be running the world these days.

Perhaps this holy season of Lent for us can offer us ways to see how so many parts of our lives connect – how one thing often leads to another. How a whisper from an ancient serpent in garden of paradise caused a pile of problems for humanity that we are still trying to unpack and think through.

How a prayer on behalf of a friend can coincide with a few nights of quiet sleep and the easing of pain. How one act of kindness is returned when we least expect it. How as much as we want to dismiss the cliché: how many times have doors been opened when other doors close. How acts of self-denial still remind us how dependent we are on God and one another.

In the end, ours is not a story of our falling – apologies to St. Augustine. Ours is story of our rising. Our rising to new life and hope in Christ we are redeemed, restored and forgiven.