

“Disregard, Dismiss, Dishonor”  
Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7;  
Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

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We are beginning Lent, and in some ways, today’s Genesis scripture takes us back to the beginning, as well. It takes us back to our founding story, to the description of how Adam and Eve were in the garden and found that they were willing to think about another story after having walked with God in the garden. Simply being told that the forbidden fruit might not be so bad after all, they were beginning to imagine what that might mean, to grasp for that other way to see, and wonder what it might be like.

In some ways, that feels like the story of humankind. We’re always thinking that I can make up the story that’s going to work better for my life than anyone else can. I can think about ways of doing things. I can grasp for certain ways of having power or control or shaping the way my life goes that will be better than anybody else can do, perhaps even better than God.

So, we have this founding story where we have them eating the fruit, and we begin to hear some of the consequences. There is something that has changed. It changed the way they see the world they live in. They begin to see their own nakedness, their own vulnerability, perhaps, their own relationship with God, in a new way. They hide from God in the garden after that. There is a sense of being ashamed, which they didn’t have before. And it breaks their relationship with God. The way it is described is that they have to leave the garden. Perhaps our history, the history of humankind, is about that broken relationship with God and how we navigate that broken relationship.

Again, the trouble that I have is that I will often tell myself particular stories. I would love to be able to take some tomato seeds or a tomato plant and put it in the ground and think that in August I’m going to have a wonderful plant, healthy and covered with tomatoes. That’s my dream. That’s my story. If I just plant the right thing at the right time, it will happen. It’s not my experience, however. My experience is that if I just do that, I’ll end up with a plant that is wilted and sickly. I can tell myself the story that it’s going to be a wonderful tomato plant, and the reality of it comes out a little differently when I don’t pay attention to it, if I don’t learn a little bit about what it takes to allow that plant to grow.

I think I do that with my own life, as well. I tell myself a story about if I just do a particular thing, everything will work out. I don’t necessarily put in the time or the learning, or recognize the complexities that are involved. I’ve learned that it’s not only not enough water that might make the plant weak, it might be too much. There are all kinds of things, a certain complexity to life, and yet I can tell myself all kinds of stories about what I think will make it happen.

Often those stories are something I imagine, or perhaps I follow a particular line of someone else’s story. I wonder how often I dismiss or disregard and end up

dishonoring God's story, God's desire to help me see a way to make the right story, a good story, a story that God's grace enables.

Jesus is in some ways confronted with that idea. He's been in the wilderness for forty days. He's been fasting. He's famished. He wants to eat. So when the tempter comes, when Satan comes and tells him to just turn the stones into bread, he's inviting Jesus to use his relationship with God for his own personal need. Jesus recognizes that and says, "I don't want to put my own need before my relationship with God. One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." It's a little shift in prioritizing his relationship with God in relation to the temptation that's before him and what's being asked of him—to simply use that relationship for his own satisfaction.

Then Jesus is taken to the pinnacle of the Temple and told, "You can jump off and God will catch you." It's that idea of testing that relationship. I don't know if you've had a friend who is always testing their relationship with you. It shows a lack of trust. It asks something of God. Again, it's using that relationship to make me feel okay. It may have gone beyond that. It may have been showing off. It may have been wanting to demonstrate power for people see. Whatever it is, Jesus is clear. He says, "I don't want to let my desire for testing to get in the way."

I want to note something else about this particular passage. If you've heard of Wendell Berry, he's written a lot about agrarian and environmental concerns. At one of his talks, somebody came up to him and quoted scripture at him, and said, "You must be wrong because here's the scripture that says so." Berry looked at him and said, "Even the devil can quote scripture."

We have to be careful as we think about this. Just because scripture is quoted doesn't mean we have found the truth. What is Jesus focusing on here? He's focusing on the relationship he has with God. Is it the right relationship? Am I trusting in God? Open to God? Listening to God?

Finally, and this is the one that brings it home, the tempter takes him up on a mountain to see the nations of the world and offers Jesus power. This is where it becomes clear. "You have to worship me," the tempter says. Jesus recognizes that's exactly what this is about. It's about breaking the relationship with God. Honoring someone else to gain power. It's so tempting to just give up a little bit of this or that so I can have the power I think I need, gain the control that my life might feel like it doesn't have. Jesus recognizes that honoring something else and disregarding God, dismissing God's ways, dismissing the relationship he has with God, dishonoring God in that way, is exactly what it's all about. So he says, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

That is perhaps a central Lenten question. How am I about honoring, worshiping, paying attention to God, and serving only God? I don't know about you, but that's a difficult question for me to always answer in the positive. Yet, Jesus is willing to send

the tempter away and focus on being with God, trusting God, bringing all his human anxieties to God and letting God deal with those, rather than trying to find the power to deal with them himself, or testing God to see if God is really there, or using what power he has to overcome those anxieties all on his own. Instead, it's like he puts his hand in the hand of God.

That is the invitation that comes out of watching what Jesus does—honoring God with our decisions and trusting God with our lives. It feels to me like it's so easy to dismiss or disregard something that God has shown us is good, and in doing that, dishonoring what God would give us and who God is, and, instead, making other gods in the process.

It is in coming to the table that we are invited to remember that God is the one who truly will nourish us and sustain us. He will bring us into a relationship that is good. We can bring our fear and our anxieties, and allow our God to feed us, to bring us into a place of communion with one another and with God, so that we can indeed go out and live in this world as those who reflect the very nature and goodness of God.

It is God's gift of grace to us that enables us to bring forth the produce that we might truly bring, the gifts of the Spirit, the grace of God in our lives, the love that enables us to be together and not get lost in the chaos and the struggles and confusions of life. Jesus, I'm sure, goes on to continue to live with the temptations and anxieties we live with, yet his invitation is to continue to trust in God, to walk with God, to come to the table that God invites us to, to come to the community God will create, and to the new life that God will give us.

Sometimes I think it takes a little recognition of the very temptations that are in my life to realize that I have a need to turn, and to hear, and to pay attention to the word of God and the grace God has given us. Amen.