

“Naked Before God”
Genesis 2:15 - 3:7 & Matthew 4:1-11
1st Sunday in Lent – February 13, 2005
Sermon by Jan Edmiston

My grandmother used to say, “The naked body is a beautiful thing. You just don’t want to share it with many people.” (In fact, you might not want *anyone* to see it, depending on the state of things.)

Since it’s the day before Valentines’ Day, dating tips abound this weekend, offering up suggestions on the “how-tos” of finding a Valentine. Like my grandmother, the purveyors of romance advise us *not* to share too *much* too *soon* with too *many*.

For example, on a first date it might be okay to disclose that you have a weakness for Krispy Kreme donuts. But you don’t want to confess that one lonely weekend last summer, you ate 2 dozen all by yourself.

It might be okay to say that your favorite drink is an apple martini. But you probably would *not* reveal that you have two *Driving While Intoxicated* tickets on your record.

We certainly don’t wish to expose our most shameful secrets to those we are trying to impress, right?

It’s said that when the man and the woman were in the garden that God made, they . . .

were both naked and were not ashamed.

The Hebrew word for “naked” here simply means *bare, nude, without clothing*.¹

But later in the story, after the woman and then the man ate of the tree in the middle of the garden, we hear that . . .

The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

And the Hebrew word *here* is different. Our translation in English is still the word “naked.” But in Hebrew the word doesn’t simply mean “without clothing.” It means something more like “spiritually exposed.”²

¹ The Hebrew word in Genesis 2:25 is *arowm* which means to be naked, bare.

In the very first romantic encounter in Biblical history, the man and the woman are naked. They've literally *just met*, but it's not a problem. They have nothing to hide. They have *done* nothing shameful. It's a beautiful thing.

This man would be called "Adam" (*adam*) which means "from the earth" – not to be confused with the name for *any* male human being: *ish*. The woman would be called "Eve" later on in this story, which means "living" – not to be confused with the word for *any* female human being: *ishshah*.³

These distinctions make a difference when you start to debate issues that have plagued the sexes for generations – issues of hierarchy and feminism and power. Issues of Original Sin and *whose fault it really was*. We won't get into all that today. That is not the purpose of this sermon.

But take note that when God told the man that *he was not allowed to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, the woman had not even been created yet.

Clearly *after* the woman was created, when they were getting to know each other, when they spent long, sweet hours talking as young lovers do – the man told the woman about the tree in the middle of their paradise. And apparently either he gave her *more* details than were related in the writing of this story, or else the woman embellished the information a little bit.

We know that God told the man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But when the woman conversed with the snake about this tree, she seemed to have a little more information. This is what she told the snake in the garden:

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."

Actually that's *not* what God said in chapter two, but again, maybe Genesis leaves out some of the details.⁴

² The Hebrew word in Genesis 3:7 is *eyrom* which implies a different kind of nakedness associated with shame. Both *arom* and *eyrom* come from the primitive root word meaning to be subtle, shrewd, crafty, prudent, to beware, to take crafty counsel.

³ The Hebrew gives us two words for "man" – *ish* and *adam*. "Adam" is first used in 2:20. The word *ishshah* means female. The name "Eve" is not introduced until 3:20.

⁴ Compare Genesis 2:17 (when God tells the man not to eat from that tree) and Genesis 3:3 (when the woman tells the snake what God said).

The reality is this: God said you can have almost everything. You can eat from all these trees – every single one of them, except for the one in the middle of the garden. *That one* shall not be a part of your diet. *That one* is mine.

But when the woman took a bite from the forbidden tree, and after the man took a bite – they suddenly realized that they were naked in more ways than one. Even after they covered up with fig leaf loincloths, they were *still* naked before God. God knew what they had done. God had seen everything.

There are times in our lives when we truly do not know what to do. We've come across a situation that has us in a social or moral or spiritual quandary. And we don't know where to turn.

But there are also occasions when we *say* we don't know what to do but, actually, we've been told exactly what to do many times. Our parents, our teachers, our Bibles have taught us what we are supposed to do, but we simply don't *want* to do it. And so we agonize between what we really *want* to do and what we know in our heart of hearts is the *right* thing to do.

Another notable aspect of this story is that nobody seems to think it's strange that the woman in the garden is talking to a snake. Maybe at the beginning of creation, all the animals could talk. At least we read that the snake could.

In the Harry Potter books, Harry has the ability to talk to snakes and it's an ominous power. It's a power he doesn't really want. It's a power that makes people fear him. Harry is called a "parse-mouth." And many assume that Harry is guilty – snake-like – just because he can understand a snake.

Apparently Eve was a bit of a "parse-mouth" too, but her sin was not that she could talk to a snake. Her sin was that she *believed* the snake, even when the snake told her that God was a liar. And so she made a choice that gave her what she really *wanted* to do even though she knew in her heart of hearts what was the *right* thing to do.

Our sin is not that we live in a world where different voices, different options are presented to us. Our sin is that we basically know what God has told us to do and be, and we have decided to go our own way.

We've been told that *only God* can really feed us, *only God* can really satisfy our deepest hunger. But when we are tempted by other fare, we often fill ourselves with what is less nourishing at best, and at worst – what eventually makes us sick.

We've heard that we are not supposed to test God, but we do it everyday. We play games with the Holy: *if you do this, I'll do that. If you give me this prize, I'll follow that rule.* But cosmically, it doesn't work this way.

We've been known to listen to voices besides that *still small voice* that speaks to us of steadfast love.⁵ This is where we must be very careful.

There is a lot of advice out there. From Dr. Phil to our next-door neighbor, from our beloved best friend to the snake in the garden, people will advise us on the way we should go. It's extremely difficult discerning who has *the right word*. As we see in Matthew's gospel, even the devil can quote scripture.⁶ Just because we hear advice that *sounds* right doesn't mean it *is* right. It takes prayer and quiet discernment.

We've heard that God is all-powerful, that God can do the impossible, that God reigns above all others. But we live as if we believe that *we* rule the world, that life is all about *us* and what *we* want.

God has seen it all. God was watching when we listened to the snakes. God was watching when we lied, when we cheated, when we shared gossip. God was watching when we could have helped someone and we didn't bother, when we could have reached out and we kept to ourselves, when we ate too much, drank too much, said too much.

God has been watching when we've tried to cover up our shame and pretend it didn't happen. God has been watching when we've tried to cover up our lies with other lies. God knows all our secrets, all our scars, all our broken places, our blemishes and our self-inflicted wounds. **We are all naked before God** and even *if we try to cover up*, God sees us as we really are. And it's not very appealing.

Before I married my Valentine, we sat down together and confessed the sins of our past. Fred and I were in our thirties when we married and, frankly, we had had long and occasionally sordid dating careers. I thought that if I told this sweet man everything I'd ever done and he *still* wanted to marry me, then maybe this might work out.

This brings us to the greatest love story of all. It started in the garden, but it's not really about Adam and Eve. It continued throughout ancient history, but it isn't about Abraham and Sarah, or Ruth and Boaz, or David and Bathsheba, or Mary and Joseph. It is a love beyond all telling. It is the kind of love in which we can disclose everything we've ever done, and our confessor still loves us. We can reveal all the times we've fallen into temptation, but our Love still wants us. We can even admit that we have wandered into the most miserable wilderness imaginable, and angels will still be sent to assist us.

⁵ The Hebrew word for steadfast love is *hesed*, found in numerous passages including Psalm 32, the suggested Psalm of the day. (Psalm 32:10).

⁶ Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12 in Matthew 4:6.

This is how much God loves us.

We are naked before God in that *God knows everything about us* and *still wants us* to spend the rest of our lives together. What will it take to make us realize that no matter what we try to do to hide, to cover up our shame, to run – God still wants us?

Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.

It's a matter of faithfulness. The Christian journey is an arduous trip – filled with hazards and pratfalls and so many voices telling us what to do that we break from the path every day. But the same God who created us male and female – *ish* and *ishshah* – still calls us *into* the wilderness and *out* of the wilderness that we might find that perfect garden once again.

So here is some spiritual Valentine's Day advice from scripture: the human body is a beautiful thing, created by God for good. Be careful about exposing yourself to snakes. But know that the God who made **you and the snake** surrounds us with steadfast love.

We come naked before God. But God loves us still.

Let us pray:

Holy and Loving God, Creator of the soul and the body, aware of our beauty and those not-so-beautiful features – how much we long to be wholly loved and washed of the past that shames us. May your Spirit wash us now. Cover our sin and surround us with your love, we pray in the name of the One who delivers us from evil and makes us whole, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.