

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lent is a time of revelation. We get the chance to see ourselves, reflected in the choices and behaviors of our parents in faith. Looking back at our genetic material, so to speak.

In this season of Lent, we...as individuals and as a faith community...are called out by God. Led or driven by God...with words like “penitence”, and “sinful”, and “repentance”. God calls us to repent...which means “change”. And, my friends, **change** we will...starting right now. I like to remind that the Episcopal Church is a place that celebrates the blessings of both heart and mind that God gave to each of us at birth...and here we are going to open, and engage, and grapple with God’s word to us today.

Our lectionary pathway for today opens with Genesis, with a lesson from early in our history as humans. It reminds of us of how we are NOT to behave in relation to God....resulting in the story of the first “cover up”. Paul continues on, within his letter to the Romans, to compare Adam to Jesus while he proclaims the good news. The behavior of Adam may have separated us from God, but the life and witness of Jesus makes it possible for all creation to come back into alignment. So, before we visit with Jesus, fasting in the wilderness and having a dialogue with Satan, let us re-set the stage and go back to the all-to-familiar story of Adham and Havva (or Adam and Eve) in the garden of Eden.

But, in Lent, let us think about repent...a “Change” of that story.

Earlier in Genesis, we re-hear the story of the creation and how, at the end of a certain cycle of creative work, God saw that “it was good”. When God made man and woman in the image of God, and granted to them the dominion of stewardship over all creation, God saw that “it was **very** good”. Cannot start any better than that. Then, regardless which translation of scripture you use, almost on the **very next** page, it all gets screwed up over a piece of fruit...and God runs us out of the garden. Vacation..la dolce vita is over, and now cursed to a life of pain and suffering.

Is not that how we have always read and understood this passage? It is the world view. Always has been: you mess up, you have to pay for it. “Eye for an eye” stuff. The punishment has to fit the crime. That is the lesson here, pure and simple. The absolute core of everything we know and live into out there.

Think about how that fruit was the single most valuable thing ever created. Why? We keep paying for it. The world constantly reminds us of it, and there are even churches here in town where the prime message is, “Mankind is evil, and has sinned. You, too, are no good, unless you come before the Lord, and beg for mercy.” It is a culture of being scared to death, instead of being raised into life. It may be why the

pews were so full for so long.

What is the developing picture here? What it is that God the Holy Spirit is telling our hearts about these stories?

Well, God knows...indeed, God DOES know...that we have the best genes going. Created in God's own image, from the elements that God first imagined, then chose to mold and shape into these human forms. We are animated by God's own breath, the *ruach* that danced over the waters of chaos and that filled the lungs of those first beings. We were created to live creatively, generously, exuberantly, abundantly. In Lent, we are now celebrating Rite 1, but we have often heard in Rite II, Eucharistic Prayer A, our proclamation in prayer to God that (quote) "In your infinite love, you made us for yourself" and THEN, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, THEN you sent your son, Jesus Christ", etc. Have you ever wondered about the sequence of that? From absolute Day One, we were created to live, and to live *shamelessly!* There can certainly be no shame when we think of how we came into being and when we consider the imprint we bear in our bones and blood and flesh. In God, after all, there is and can be no shame.

But as created in God's image, we also have the will to go down destructive paths, leading many of us to live *shame-fully*. Lent is a time to think about wanting to change that, to turn away from the shameful and turn back to the shameless. Away from the destructive, and back to the creative. Away from the stingy, the "me", and back to the generous, to the "thee". Away from a zero-based scarcity mentality, back to a confident and joyful trust in holy abundance.

Maybe we have misunderstood the whole Garden of Eden story for centuries. After all, God is not dumb...and had been at creation for quite some time before getting to us. What if that tree was planted there to provide the catalyst for humankind to separate itself from God to allow growth? So that we could become the beloved, irritating, challenging, and delightful "Other" to God? Do we really think that God could not have dreamed up creatures who would be obedient and not eat from that tree, if that was what God really wanted?

Is the expulsion from the Garden really a birth narrative? Childbirth is a physically painful event, but all mothers say that it was all worth it to watch the development of that little life. We are all expelled from the utopia of the womb into real life. We have to be, or we would die. We can only grow so far before we need wider horizons, air to breathe, solid food, and the stresses and strains of movement to develop.

God intends for us to live shamelessly, as we are created in the image of Perfect Beauty. In the image of Infinite Truth. Of Unmeasured Joy. We are created to be worthy companions of the Creator, and there is nothing to be ashamed of. God created us not just for the company or the companionship in the ways that our limited and flawed imaginations can know, but within a far, far deeper intimacy that our hearts only rarely or occasionally touch in our lifetimes. Those singular instances of wonderful and joyfilled life that

we can and will remember upon the very moments of passing from this life onto the next.

Yet, most of us are not taught about our divine glory, but about our human shame before we even speak our first word. We are taught to “cover up” from infancy. We learn to cover up our bodies, our mistakes, our emotions, our pain, our dreams, our honest thoughts, our wisdom, our strength, and our fruitful observations. In the process, we come to believe that only part of us is even able to be holy.

And that is where we lose our way.

Finding...or losing our way. Consider that is why Jesus was led into the wilderness. To ponder the extent to which he would live into God’s intention for humanity to be holy...to be a child of God.

God did not...and does not..intend for us to be “partially holy.” God does not want us at war with ourselves, with the holy part of God’s image in conflict with some unholy part trying to destroy one another or get the upper hand. And the life of Jesus...which came to be fully after his wilderness experience...shows us that a human being can be **all-the-way-holy**. The story of the incarnation is a story about living shamelessly into the image that God told us we could claim as our own.

As we start together in this pilgrimage of Lent, I suggest that we begin to dismantle those fig leaves which cover up the glory, beauty, joy, and truth of who we are. We need to live without shame as embodiments of holiness of God.

I am reminded again that, in his inaugural address upon being elected the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela quoted these words of Marianne Williamson:

“We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?’

Actually, who are you *not* to be?

You are a child of God.

Your ‘playing small’ does not serve the world . . .

We are born to make manifest the glory of God within us.”

Therefore, in this Lent, we are invited to manifest that glory....which is the body and blood from which we all were created...and to live shamelessly into the fullness of our holy image. The holy image of the loving and eternal God revealed to us in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.