

“Creation in Balance?”

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Welcome to the Garden of Eden. It seems fitting that we begin our Creationtide sermon series here in the garden. It is here in the garden where humanity, the animals, the creation and the Creator all lived in balance and harmony together. However; we know that it was not perfect in the garden. If it were perfect our friend here, the snake, would not have been able to shift the balance.

Genesis 3:1-7 (The Voice Translation)

Serpent: Is it true that God has forbidden you to eat *fruits* from the trees of the garden?

Eve: *No, serpent. God said we are free to eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. We are granted access to any variety and all amounts of fruit with one exception: the fruit from the tree found in the center of the garden. God instructed us not to eat or touch the fruit of that tree or we would die.*



Serpent: *Die? No, you'll not die. God is playing games with you. The truth is that God knows the day you eat the fruit from that tree you will awaken something powerful in you and become like Him: possessing knowledge of both good and evil.*

The woman *approached the tree*, eyed its fruit, and coveted its *mouth-watering, wisdom-granting* beauty. She plucked a fruit from the tree and ate. She then offered *the fruit* to her husband who was close by, and he ate as well. Suddenly their eyes were opened *to a reality previously unknown*. For the first time, they sensed *their vulnerability and rushed to hide* their naked bodies, stitching fig leaves into crude loincloths

I know I am taking an unconventional look at this scripture. I am not talking about Sin. I am using this scripture to talk about how humanity experienced its relationship with God and Creation. Before this moment humanity experienced life in balance – and all was good. Then the snake comes along and everything changes.

I am not blaming the snake for what happened next. I am simply stating what the snake does – he points out the imbalance between God and humanity. The snake claims that eating a piece of fruit will actually balance the playing field for humanity -create a better balanced relationship between God and humanity. In this moment that humanity makes the decision, to try and balance the scales – to eat the fruit and try and become more like God, everything does change forever. However; eating the fruit doesn't balance the scales. Instead it throws

everything farther out of balance. Outside of the garden life is hard for everyone, including the snake. God's resources are no longer easily available to humanity.



I find it interesting how we have idealized this garden experience while at the same time continuing to struggle with that thing the snake pointed out – the imbalance between God and humanity. That imbalance existed both in and out of the garden. What changed is how we experience our relationship with God and God's Creation. In the garden humanity had it easy, all of Creation's resources were readily available and we lived in peace and balance with all of known creation – and in relationship with God. Outside of the garden, humanity feels out of balance – we have to work for creation's resources – and we have to work at our relationship with God. I believe that since the moment humanity left the balance and harmony of the garden we have been trying to create the garden experience – where the resources of creation are plentiful and we felt at peace with our relationship with God.

It is interesting that in this attempt to create the garden experience that we have treated the earth as if it is a never ending resource for us – we have placed our desires and comfort about the needs of creation – the way we imagine it was in the garden. Look at our history of domination of the earth: Pushing wildlife and people off of land for mass cattle grazing, clear cutting of forests for development – overusing both the land and the trees. Mining for coal to make our lives easier. Drilling for oil wherever we find it. Damning rivers and streams to make water go where we desire – not where it naturally flows – so our desert cities and our mass agricultural farms have water. Factories that produce pollution unchecked.

Wait, you might say. We are learning of the damage these things have caused. And yes, we now look at the environmental impact of drilling, mining, and factory pollution. The air and water are cleaner than they were when I was a child. We don't clear cut here in the US as much – and in Oregon we plant a tree for every tree we take down. Yesterday was Earth day and many people spent the day intentionally cleaning up and taking care of the earth.

But do we really live in balance? With the environment and each other?

Sometimes our human "needs" override our desire to care for the environment – and each other. Fracking for natural gas – a better alternative to burning coal? – is creating earthquakes which is causing damage to people's homes and businesses. Windmill farms are possibly responsible for damaging the habitats of endangered animals. A legal document was filed in December finding that the existing environmental assessment for the Dakota Access pipeline suffered from fatal flaws – and yet getting



oil to where we want it has been deemed more important than the risks to the water system. Coltane and lithium are mined in politically unstable African countries by children pumped with drugs to provide the output we desire for our technology habits.

Other times our desire to take prove that we are taking care of the earth bumps into the care of humanity.

Back in 1979 Earth Day celebrations were interrupted by people from the Chippewa tribe because legislation to create a national park – to preserve the earth – was taking away reservation land that belonged to the Chippewa people – land that was important to their way of life. Some Cattle Ranchers today would say the same thing about some of the National Park land. They argue that it is impeding their ability to feed their families by limiting cattle grazing.

Regardless of your opinion of any of these situations they serve as reminders that the balance between humanity and creation is not as simple as we sometimes try and make it.

Every summer when I take our Middle schoolers to the Yakama reservation in Washington I am challenged to think about how complicated the humanity – environmental balance is. We camp and work on a Just Living farm owned by a Minister who lives this struggle every day. He grows just enough to survive and help provide for the needier in the community while trying to stay in balance with the land he lives on. Every year he has to decide how much of his land to cultivate – and how much to leave wild for the animals who live on the reservation. Cultivate too little and he can't survive – or give out to his neighbors. Cultivate too much and the animals who live in the brush come out and eat his crops – causing the same problem as cultivating too little. Even how much water he uses – or his decision about whether or not to use pesticides impacts not only himself – but also the land and other people.

He really gets the kids and myself thinking about that balance question. He tries to get us to think less about right and wrong choices. And more about simply trying to expand how we think about the choices we make – expand how we think about how we are connected which means that every choice we make has some impact on another person and the earth. There is no way to avoid it. Even Vegetarians have a negative impact on some piece of creation.



I leave you this morning with some questions inspired from the Episcopal Catechism of Creation:

- Can we use fuels, crops and materials for housing, clothing, food, entertainment, and other purposes in a way that sustains these things for future generations and causes as little harm to the earth and other creatures?
- Can we learn about the great diversity of living things and their environments, and urge our neighbors, churches and governments to become better educated about regional, national and global pressures on the environment?
- Should we initiate, support and take part in the efforts of individuals, organizations and governments to set aside for both urban and rural residents places of beauty for their natural value and our delight and refreshment?
- Can each of us choose to live of more simply, rejecting habits of wasteful consumption and making thoughtful choices for decent living for ourselves and others?

