



Date: August 20, 2017

Title: "Adam and Eve, Part Two; Long-Lasting Love"

Scripture: Genesis 5: 1-5; 3:22-34

Description: Let's consider the story of Adam and Eve as being, not about sin and disobedience, but about the single most important issue in life. It's a story of love. The story of Adam and Eve offers several ingredients of love that lasts.

Last week, I pointed out that there are two versions of the story of Adam and Eve. I was wrong about that. Actually, there are three stories of the beginning of humankind. The third story is such a brief summary, it may be considered a trailer for the other two, but I believe it has something for us on its own. You decide. (It's on p. 4.)

Genesis 5:1 – 5.

How did Adam live so many years? Maybe time was calculated differently in the Genesis era before Noah and the Flood. Maybe a long life was the result of a good life. Nine hundred thirty years is the Bible's way of affirming Adam's life-story.

What about Eve? If you do a web search for "Eve—Images", it's almost impossible to find a picture of Eve that doesn't include either an apple (the forbidden fruit), or the snake. You might conclude that the only significant aspect of Eve is that she brought sin into the world. I don't accept that. I believe the story of Adam and Eve is a story of love, and that both Adam and Eve have much to offer us about living a life of love.

The Bible says nothing about Eve dying. All the heroes of Genesis die: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the deaths of all their wives are recorded as well—Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel. Even Leah, Jacob's unloved first wife is honored in her death. Same for Noah, Joseph, Moses, Moses' brother, Aaron, even Moses' sister, Miriam. Only Eve is never described as dying.

Perhaps that, too, is a way of giving her special honor. Remember the name given her by Adam, "Eve", means "mother of all living." The mother of all living just goes on living and living and living.

I want to return to the end of Adam and Eve, Act 2. The forbidden fruit has been eaten and shared. The consequences have been described. How shall Adam and Eve respond? We pick up the story in Genesis 3:22.

For most of history, we've been taught the story of Adam and Eve as a stern lesson: "Do as you're told. Be grateful for what you already have. Know your limits. You live in a world with boundaries and limitations. Follow the rules or get out." I wonder if we're ready to hear something else about the first two humans. What if we recognized that the first story in the Bible is about the most important issue in life. The Bible begins with what we need most: how to live a life of love. The only thing more powerful than isolation is togetherness; the only thing more forceful than hate is love. That is ancient, original wisdom we desperately need.

The most important issue in life is not about guilt and punishment. The most important skill is not learning how to obey the rules. The most important matter is how to build relationships of love. The story of Adam and Eve is not just about sin, disobedience, ingratitude, the squandering of opportunity, and ruining life for the rest of us. Their story is also about love, about tenacity, bouncing back from calamity, and modeling resilience. When we read the story of Adam and Eve open to the idea that it might be about love, we see surprising things.

In Genesis' story of Adam and Eve, we learn that God did not want to come into the world other than through a family. God did not want to draw near to humanity other than through a home. That is why, from the very beginning, God said, "It is not good for one to be alone."

Last Sunday I said that the story contains the word "good" seven times, and the words "not good" appear only once. Those same two words appear one other time in Genesis, much later, when Moses is told it is "not good" for him to lead alone. And yet many of us feel alone. The fundamental message of Adam and Eve is that we have to find a way to bridge that loneliness.

Today we have the most individualistic society in all of history. You can trace the rise of our loneliness through titles of three best-selling books: David Riesman in 1950, *The Lonely Crowd*, Robert Putman in 1996, *Bowling Alone*, and Sherry Turkle in 2011, *Alone Together*." We are a lonely crowd, and that's at the heart of our unhappiness.

That's the lesson of Adam and Eve. We've missed the main lesson by focusing on the theme of sin and disobedience. Let's restore the idea that life is about relationships, about love. When we do, maybe we'll give our own relationships more

importance. In the first two-people story in the Bible, we have a good example of what that means.

First of all, love that lasts is more than just gazing into each other's eyes. In The Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve gazed at each other. Adam wrote poetry. That was in the early stages, and it was exhilarating. But later that love grew into something richer. To love someone is not just a strong feeling. It's a decision. It's a promise. The Bible uses the word, "covenant."

The word "covenant" is in the Old Testament 314 times. It's such an old-fashioned, yesterday word. Can you imagine the word "covenant" being used in a Valentine's Day card? "#covenant" is not rampant. Yet, covenant is the core of real love.

In Disney stories, a couple find each other, fall in love, and live happily ever after. Not in life. Falling is misleading. Falling is easy; standing and staying takes work. Falling is just a reaction, it's something that happens to you. Standing and staying require effort. Yet long-lasting love is what we're after. We say we want to fall in love, but what we really want is to stand in love.

Adam and Eve decide to stay together. When Eve eats of the forbidden fruit and gains wisdom, she could have established a life on her own. Instead she returns to Adam. Adam could have separated from her when he learned what she had done. Instead, he joined her and ate the forbidden fruit. When they were expelled from Eden, they could have gone their separate ways. "You going East? Fine! Then I'm going north. See ya!" Instead, they go together. They could have separated forever after losing their son; instead they come together and have another child.

Love is not about "happily ever after." Love is not about avoiding hardship; it's about overcoming it. It's not about being problem-free; it's about working through problems. "Love bears all things," says the New Testament.

Love is hard. In fact, love grows in hardship. Describing the consequences of their eating the fruit, God tells Adam "by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food." God tells Eve that having children will cause a lot of pain. In other words, the important things in life are going to be hard on you. Immediately after, Adam names Eve, "the mother of all living things." (Gen. 3:20) A name is a very personal gift of love. That deeper level of love arose when they faced hardship.

By the way, that's when God clothes them as well. In the aftermath of their disobedience, in the grip of both struggle and danger, in the face of darkness, God clothes them. God's love also steps up in times of trouble.

Adam gives Eve her name. In real love, you pay attention to each other. The first woman's name described Eve at her very core. In lasting love, you pay attention. You look inside the other and see each other deeply. You also focus on the positive. Adam could have named the woman, "Deceiver" or "Rule-breaker" or "Ruiner." No—"Eve—the Mother of All Living." In true, long-lasting love, you are aware of what you don't like about the other person, but you focus on what you do like. You see and help the other person see the beauty and good qualities.

I'm into long-lasting love these days. Maybe it's learning that one of our couples will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary next month. I know, that pales in comparison to Adam and Eve's 930 years together, but it's a start. I like long-lasting. Maybe it's my car, turning another milestone click on the odometer. Maybe it's our time together.

When Pleasant Hill Church began, I wondered what would be the effect of a pastor spending an entire ministry with one congregation. Most ministers move on after three to five years. So we have to create only three to five years' worth of sermons and program ideas, accumulate 3-5 years of mistakes, then shove them into the closet and move on. I'm into long-lasting, and we've done something important by staying together through the years.

I value friends, especially friendships that go way back. I honor children who grow into adults, then care for elderly parents. I appreciate church members who stay, who endure transitions and new hymns and different programs and stay because at the center of a church are people who love each other over the long haul.

Long-lasting love changes over time. [Fireworks turn into familiarity. Candlelight dinners turn into travel team carpools. "When you came, you were like sparkling wine, and the taste of you burnt with its sweetness. Now you are like warm bread, smooth and pleasant, and I can hardly taste you at all, for I know your flavor. And yet, I am completely nourished."

Love that lasts: from the very beginning Adam and Eve demonstrate its power to sustain life. It's the answer to our loneliness. It's offered in scripture and here in this family of faith.