

MESSAGE..... *The Drama of Desire*.....Pastor Susan

Today we look to that dreaded fruit of what western culture defines as “the apple.” Of course, there is no reference at all in the story of Adam and Eve that what they ate was an apple, but they simply ate the fruit from the tree of Good and Evil.

So here we have a story of chicanery, of disobedience, of desire, of shame, of fear and of consequences. In other words, we have a story here that illustrates the human condition.

As the story goes, there are two trees in this garden that God gave to the first humans. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Good and Evil. We read a few weeks ago that through the nourishment from the Tree of Life, we become the image of God, imitating God’s desires. In contrast, through the poisoning from the Tree of Good and Evil, we succumb to the desires of the world.

This story explains exactly what is the problem with the world, not only many thousands of years ago, but the problem with the world today. We watch the news and exclaim, “What in the world is happening?” Well, this story of Eve, the snake, and the mango, explain exactly what is wrong with the world.

What’s wrong with the world is that humans are not perfect. Some might say we’re broken. Other’s might say we’re sinners. Whatever you want to call it, there is something about us that needs guidance and healing.

So, what is it that needs healing? What’s wrong with humans? What’s wrong with us - is our desires. Not that we have desires, there’s nothing wrong with desiring, but what’s wrong with humans - is what we choose to desire.

And what is wrong with our desires? Well, we have a choice. It’s called free will. We can choose to take in God’s desires by finding nourishment from the Tree of Life, or we can choose to take in the world’s desires by seeking nourishment from the Tree of Good and Evil. One is a path toward life and one is a path toward death. Here’s the difference.

With the world's desires we compete. With God’s desires we create.

With the world's desires we impress. With God's desires we bless.
With the world's desires we seek to defeat. With God's desires we seek to protect.
With the world's desires we dominate. With God's desires we serve.
With the world's desires we exploit. With God's desires we respect.
With the world's desires we choose a kind of death.
With the Lord's desires we choose a kind of life.

When we go back to ask the question – What is wrong with the world? It all comes down to these desires.

McLaren suggests that there is an antidote to this story in Genesis three. There is another story that is a kind of reversal of Adam, Eve, the serpent and the mango. It's found in a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Having the same mind as Christ Jesus is nourishment from the Tree of Life. And so, what was Christ Jesus' mind? Jesus is a model for us. A model that is creative and self-giving. A model that loves, that doesn't discriminate, that serves, forgives, blesses, offers compassion and hope. In our lives we can choose to desire what the world desires or what Jesus desires.

The theme of this Adam and Eve story can be found in religions across the globe, but none so similar as what we find in Buddhism. Buddhist teachings say that desire leads to suffering. Not all desire, just the "desire to acquire." The desires to acquire are pretty much anything you see on any advertisement anywhere – from TV to radio to billboards to Facebook, and so on.

It's those desires that will plunge us into ingratitude, discontent, greed, and will eventually, if we let these desires get a grip on us, we will eventually fall into a competition that becomes a rivalry with others. And this is what leads to violence. Buddhism teaches us that this is what leads us to great suffering.

Buddhism also teaches that detachment is the antidote. Not detachment from desires all together, because again, we can't keep ourselves from having desires; but attaching ourselves to a higher desire. For Buddha, that higher desire is a

desire for contentment, a freedom from greed, a longing for harmony and the ultimate reach for enlightenment. As far as I can see, that certainly sounds like the Tree of Life in our tradition.

Neither Buddha nor Jesus were the least bit interested in setting up some kind of system of beliefs, some kind of doctrine to be mastered. But both of these spiritual gurus lived a way of life worthy of imitating. We can learn how to live and practice our own Godly life that was lived out by Buddha and Jesus, through lining ourselves up with their desires – these kind of divine desires that we will know when we have the “mind of Christ Jesus.”

To imitate Christ Jesus does not solely come down to feeding the hungry, visiting those in prison, and opening our doors to strangers. Imitating Christ Jesus means we go off and pray with fervor every day. It means we remain connected to our creator every moment we’re able. It means we serve all and take on a mantle of humility. It means we don’t act as if we are God, but we allow God to live in us and through us. It means that we succumb to God’s will and not our own. It means that we offer ourselves quite literally as the hands and feet of the resurrected Christ

I want to suggest one final thing. We Christians have an awful lot of powerful symbols to help guide us along our journey. Actually, all religions do, but let’s reflect on one of the most powerful symbols Christians have. It is the symbol of the table, the bread and the cup.

Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Good and Evil. They took it into their bodies, and they absorbed the dreaded fruit. They let it nourish them in the same way a Twinkie will nourish our physical bodies.

In contrast, Jesus offered us a way to eat from the Tree of Life. This table is a way where we can physically take into our bodies God’s desires. A way where we can be nourished by God’s fruit. More like an organic power bar than a Twinkie.

You will be invited to the table soon. You may choose Christ’s body and Christ’s life for yourself. If that is your choice, you will be nourished by the one and only True God and by doing so you will turn away from the desires of the world and you will begin a life again having the desires of God. May it be so.

Let us pray... God of all, God of many, God of one, we ask that you give us the strength to turn away from the desires that seemingly feel and taste so good. The desires of the world that inevitably will lead us to some kind of destruction. We ask instead to empower us to turn toward the Tree of Life, we seek the nourishment of your spirit and feed on your desires and your desires alone. As we prepare ourselves for the invitation to your banquet, may we become aware of our choices to feed on the Tree of Good and Evil OR turn toward your tree that gives us life, that heals, and that leads us into living in a way where we are bearers of your image alone. In this we pray in the name of our Lord, teacher and savior, Christ Jesus. Amen.