

## **2024 06 23 – *Eve, The First Woman***

**Scripture: Genesis 2:15–3:23** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

This summer I have decided to preach a series of sermons based on the stories of women that we find in the Hebrew Scriptures. I'm doing this mostly to keep myself interested in preaching during what can be the dog days of the summer; but also because I want to learn more about these biblical women. Most of them are well-known; but others may be new to some of us. I'm beginning the series with a story from the book of Genesis, one of the creation stories, the story of Eve, the first woman.

I'm sure you have all heard of Eve. You just listened as Amanda read the beginning of her story as it is found in chapters 2 & 3 of Genesis. So I'm going to invite you to tell me what you already know about Eve. How would you describe her? Using a word or a phrase tell me something about Eve. (wait for answers: mother, child-bearer, Adam's partner, tempted, temptress, fallen, weak, afraid, aware, subjugated). My hope today is to expand our thinking about Eve and the role that she plays in this story and in our own stories.

So first I want to remind you that the stories in Genesis, including this creation story, are, in fact, origin myths of the Hebrew people. These stories are an ancient people's attempt to make sense of their circumstance and to describe how their lands and their people came to be. As Christians, we have adopted these myths as part of our story. Of course, calling something a myth does not

negate the truths that exists within the story. There always many truths that we can discover in the myths that have formed our various cultures.

For instance, scientists have discovered that there really was, in a way, a first woman. They call her Mitochondrial Eve. She is described in Wikipedia as “the most recent woman from whom all living humans descend in an unbroken line purely through their mothers and through the mothers of those mothers, back until all lines converge on one woman.” So Mitochondrial Eve was not necessarily the very first woman, but she is the ancestor of all people on earth today. The idea of one woman from whom all humankind has descended is actually scientifically true. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitochondrial\\_Eve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitochondrial_Eve)

But there are other, more troubling, aspects of the story of Eve that I would like to explore. In particular, the story of the snake and the expulsion of the first woman and the first man from the Garden of Eden. At the beginning of today’s reading, YHWH told the earth creature, or Adam, that he was not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Obviously, Adam must have told Eve, because she seemed to be aware of this rule. But it didn’t stop her from believing the snake and eating the fruit of that forbidden tree. Adam also took the fruit that she offered and ate it. According to the story, God punished them for their disobedience by banishing them from the Garden of Eden.

This story or myth was used by the ancient Hebrews to explain many aspects of their way of living. It explained how their people moved from hunter gatherers to an agrarian lifestyle. It also explained why women suffered great pain in child

birth and why cultivating the soil was such hard work. It explained their culture's understanding of marriage and also the patriarchal society in which they lived where women were subjugated by their husbands and were often treated as chattel. Origin stories are written to explain the way things are, not necessarily the way things should be.

And sometimes they are interpreted in ways that can cause even greater suffering. For instance this story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden led St. Augustine, in the fifth century, to proclaim that their disobedience caused something called original sin. He argued that because of Adam & Eve's disobedience everyone is born sinful. This means that we are born with a built-in urge to do bad things and to disobey God. That even a newborn is filled with this fallen nature and needs to be baptized in order to be right with God. This is still a doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church. Imagine the emotional and spiritual pain of parents who have been taught this doctrine and whose child dies before they can be baptized.

Personally, I lean more towards the concept of original blessing, not original sin. I believe in the idea that God's creation is "good." Yes, sin exists in this world but it is not the result of some original act of disobedience by Eve and, her partner, Adam. I believe that sin is an act that causes harm to ourselves, another person or some other part of creation. It is a way that we separate ourselves from the Holy Mystery, the Essence of Love. It is self-created not something that we are born with, and certainly not the result of the fallen nature of two people who may

have lived tens of thousands of years ago. <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/original-blessing-2017-01-04/>

In fact, I would like to introduce a very different interpretation of the role that Eve plays in this myth. In this story Eve has supposedly made a huge mistake by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What if we look at imperfections, or mistakes, as adaptations that help us to evolve or grow? What if every time we break the rules, think outside the box, or challenge the status quo, we are in fact contributing to the evolution of the human race? What if Eve was actually moving humankind forward or even upward when she ate the fruit of that tree? That would mean that Eve's disobedience was not original sin at all, but instead was an original blessing, making Eve a hero, a leader, and a visionary. Eve would be the icon of courage, assuring the survival of future generations by passing on the qualities that we need to adapt and thrive in our ever-changing world.

[https://riverofgrassuu.org/uploads/3/5/1/8/35180936/original\\_blessing.pdf](https://riverofgrassuu.org/uploads/3/5/1/8/35180936/original_blessing.pdf)

Here's another way to think about it. What if we compared the wisdom that Eve gained by eating from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, with the kind of awareness that comes as children mature into adults. Every child, as part of their growing process, tests the boundaries that their parents have set for them and are often disobedient. This is how we discover consequences, how we test the limits of our own abilities and discover the difference between right and wrong. Is it possible that Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden just as children need to eventually leave the safety of their parents' home? Could the

story of their expulsion, be just the first step in the maturing or evolution of the human race? <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2014/08/eve-was-framed-the-serpent-was-right/>

It is a very different way to think about this story, isn't it? Eve has, for many centuries, been identified as a weak or evil temptress who caused the fall of humanity. But she could, just as easily be the strong leader, the courageous visionary who opened humanity's eyes to both the good and the evil that exist in our world.

Which of these interpretations has meaning for you? Which one helps to open your eyes to the wonder of God's creation? Which one leads you closer to the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being? Which one inspires you to take your place as a co-creator in God's evolution of love?