

Proper 5 Year B: 9/ 10 June 2018
Patricia Kay Jue, lay preacher

It is not about the Devil, but about G-d.

Genesis 3:8-15

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

Beelzebul, the leader of Evil Spirits, demons, Satan, the Devil.

Today's readings lead us to think about the Devil. In the Gospel reading, Jesus has returned home. Jesus and his disciples have been wandering around Galilee. Jesus has healed the sick. In the language of that time, Jesus has healed those with unclean spirits and driven out their many demons. Crowds of people have pressed upon him, pushing their way in, to touch Jesus, and to be touched by Jesus. Now, as Jesus returns to his family's village, the crowds continue to press around him. There are so many, so close, so demanding, that Jesus and his disciples are unable to get away to eat. The crowds do not understand how Jesus heals. They may not care. But the learned men of Jerusalem think they have the answer. In the language of their time, they proclaim "The Devil makes Jesus do it." But it is not through the power of Satan that Jesus heals. Rather, Jesus is about G-d, and how G-d works, and moves and walks with us, in our lives. But, for the scribes, for the ancients, and for us, the idea of the Devil is a very powerful image: evil forces abound.

Think back to the Genesis story. What do you hear in this narrative? What words catch your ears? What thoughts do you overlay upon this passage of Scripture? Do you picture the Devil disguised as a serpent, entwined around a tree or vine, holding an apple in its mouth...enticing the woman? Perhaps that snake even has the face of the Devil, emphasizing the connection between snake and Devil. Or maybe your image of the story focuses on the man and the woman: the woman, beguiling, with lovely, long hair flowing down her body, as she holds a half-eaten apple out to the man. Or does your mind do a quick fast forward to these humans,, driven out of the Garden, out of Paradise, into a Land of Shame, and Toil?

I think, thanks to, or perhaps better worded, cursed by, centuries of “interpretation” we hear this story:

as an excuse to make females inferior because the woman was tricked first,
as one of womankind being vixens, seducing menfolk,
or if men, weak, distracted, not strong enough to face G-d

because here is the rub. We want this story to be about us – Adam and Eve – and about “what the Devil makes us do.” But part of hearing these passages is to ask “Where is G-d in this story, in our story?”

“They hear the sound of the Lord G-d walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.”

This is how the writers of Scripture describe the relationship between G-d and the first peoples, of how they try to convey something they can only imagine, trapped using the words and experiences of their own time.

In the beginning, the relationship was such that G-d would walk with G-d’s people, in a garden, in the cool of the night. For a Bible people, living in the lands that will eventually become Palestine, Israel and the Jordan, being able to relax in the cool night air was one of great pleasures of the day. Gardens speak of luxury, abundance and Sabbath rest. The relationship between G-d and those first humans was that they could simply be with each other, walking, in companionship, in the richness and comfort of the cool night air: the way G-d meant creation to be.

But now things are changed. G-d asks “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” G-d, being all knowing, knows the answer to these questions, but what is revealed to us is the changed relationship between G-d, and Adam and Eve. Adam could have replied: “Yes, I ate.” but instead Adam replies

“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

When confronted by the reality of what he had done, Adam blames Eve – “She gave me the fruit” – and in the next breath, blames G-d: “the woman whom you gave to me.” In one sentence, Adam rips apart the relationship between himself and G-d, and between himself and all other humans. (After all, at this stage Eve is the only other human around.) And Eve shares in this blame. Having been accused by Adam, Eve points to the snake.

The Garden is no longer a place of Peace. Adam and Eve blame each other, and they blame another one of G-d's creations – in the snake— and they blame G-d. Relationship now changed. Think on this: When we are ashamed, we often seek an excuse. When people lose faith in the abundance of G-d's creation there is a tendency to hoard, rather than share. When nations are fearful, they have a history of singling out the foreigner, the immigrant and the other. But remember, ultimately, this story, and our story is not about Satan. Evil forces seem to abound. We cry: "Out of the depths have we called to you, O G-d"¹ And this is G-d's answer: "Love one another as I have loved you." In the words of Jesus:

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of G-d is my brother and sister and mother."²

Walk with each other. Be with each other. Listen to each other's' stories as we learn to keep each other in our prayers and in truth.

¹ Psalm 130 (slightly altered)

² Mark 3:33-34