

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden found in Genesis 3 is one of the classics in all of literature. Or more correctly, it is the basis for so much great literature that has drawn on its richness. We know the events of the fruit of the tree, the serpent's tempting, and Eve and Adam's acquiescing by the foreboding name "The Fall". Reading the Genesis narrative sequentially, many throughout the ages have interpreted that a state of original grace or utopia was the beginning of all things, and then trouble came to River City in a BIG WAY but in such a small form. Regardless, life was never the same.

I raise this scenario, in part, to invite you to four weeks of a brief study on the archetypal narratives in the beginning of what is the beginning: Genesis. Creation, Fall, Flood, and the Call of Abraham will be analyzed with our brothers and sisters from Church of the Archangels Greek Orthodox, First Presbyterian Church, and St. John's Lutheran. We begin in just less than a week—Thursday, October 20—and we will continue for the following three Thursdays—October 27, November 3, November 10. Each evening begins at 7:00 PM, and we rotate among the churches, beginning at St. Francis, moving to the Greek Orthodox Church, then First Presbyterian, and finish up at St. John's. If you can make one or all of them, you will be pleased you did. My colleagues—Harry Pappas, David Van Dyke, and Duane Pederson—are top notch theologians and fine students of the human condition.

Which is one of the reasons for raising the Genesis 3 narrative in this note: it exemplifies so well the human condition. Indeed, a favorite interpretation of the Genesis 3 story is that it is not so much "The Fall" as it is a "Fall Upward". Think about it. Humans from Milton and *Paradise Lost* to those who continue to search for the fountain of youth or the legends of the tree of life love to fantasize about a utopic moment where all was tranquil and harmonious. Sin entered in. We *fell away* from that prized position, and we would never return again.

Yet, the idea of the "Fall Upward" is an intriguing one that, perhaps, squares more fully with what we know and experience in life. Certainly, the story in Genesis 3 seeks to convey the crux of the problem with why there is pain, suffering, and death in life. It isn't so much that we fell from grace, rather than it is that we tried like hell to be something that we were not. We fell to the most common vices: desire, hubris, longing, power. The fruit, you see, would make us like God. And who would not want that? It was our reaching and striving and longing and desire that was ultimately our stumbling block. In essence, we fell up.

And the results have been a yoke upon us and a prod in our side ever since. We get in trouble when we see the allure of whatever form the fruit may take, which promises us more than we can imagine. Again, power, knowledge, being like God are seductive features that engage us in a myriad ways throughout life. The initial recognition of nakedness after transgressing God's command—reported in the Genesis 3 narrative—seems almost tame from our modern perch. However, it is, perhaps, the eons of innocence that has been thrown under the bus of human activity that finds us in a place where we continue to move the marker of what truly embarrasses and shakes us to the core of understanding our complicity and our contravention.

Though should we be surprised? The roadmap for such behavior and the trajectory of our denial of wrongdoing is written into the very text of Genesis 3. Blame is everywhere. Accountability is not. Eve blames the serpent. Adam blames Eve. And on and on we go pushing away the

agency that we possess, only to move farther away from that place of innocence. Thankfully, God provides “clothing” for the creatures in the garden. An act of mercy and grace in and of itself. An act also that holds up a repeating theme within the divine-human connection. Even as we “miss the mark” (which is the essence of the Greek word for sin), and while there are consequences for our actions, there is also mercy and grace.

Did the Genesis 3 account really happen this way? Perhaps that is the wrong question. The really pressing question and overwhelming reality is: What do we do as the Garden scene continues to repeat itself?