

July 7, 2019
Women of the Bible
Eve: Lifegiver

Ancient Reading ~ *Genesis 2:25 – 3:13, 3:20-3:23*

The woman and the man were both naked, though they were not embarrassed or ashamed.

Now the snake was the most cunning and crafty of all the animals that YHWH had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from the trees in the garden?” The woman answered the snake, “We may eat fruit from all the other trees in the garden. But of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘Don’t eat it and don’t touch it, or you will die.’” The snake said to the woman, “Die? You won’t die! God knows well that on the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil!” So when the woman saw that the tree was good and pleasant for food, and that it was a delight to look at, and that it was desirable for the knowledge it could give, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She gave some also to the man beside her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. When they heard the sound of YHWH walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, they hid from YHWH’s presence among the trees of the garden. YHWH called to the man, “Where are you?” The man replied, “I heard the sound of you in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid.”

“Who told you of nakedness? Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I forbade you to eat?” The man replied, “It was the woman you put beside me; she gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” Then YHWH asked the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman replied, “The snake tempted me, so I ate.”

Adam named the woman Eve (“Lifegiver”),
because she was the mother of all the living.

YHWH made clothes of animal skins for them to wear. Then YHWH said, “Look, these humans have become like one of us, knowing good and evil. They must not be allowed to take in their hands the fruit from the Tree of Life as well, or they will eat of it, and live forever...” So YHWH drove them from the garden of Eden, and sent them to till the soil from which they had been taken.

Second Reading

~ *adapted from Rachel Held Evans in “A Year of Biblical Womanhood”*

For centuries, the figure of Eve has been a subject of great interest in Western art, literature, and philosophy. Upon her naked body man has projected his most visceral fears and desires concerning women, so she is presented as both seductress and mother, savage and domesticator, deceiver and the deceived; Eve, a sort of biblical Pandora who cracked open the box and brought perpetual shame upon her sex. The theologian Tertullian told Christian women, “You are the devil’s

gateway. Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age, and the guilt, necessarily, lives on too.”

What we read into the Creation narrative often says as much about us as it says about the text. And for women emerging from the Judeo-Christian tradition, the vilification of Eve has been disastrous. A passage that might challenge readers to aspire to the love and mutuality of Paradise has instead been used for centuries to justify forcing women into subordination as a perpetuation of the curse, with theologians from the apostle Paul to Martin Luther noting, somewhat begrudgingly, that women are nonetheless necessary for procreation.

And so, at least symbolically, the blood of Eve courses through each one of her daughters’ veins. We are each associated with life; each subject to the impossible expectations and cruel projections of men; each fallen, blamed, and misunderstood; and each stubbornly vital to the process of bringing something new— new life! Perhaps something better —into this world. So, in a sense, Tertullian was right. We are each an Eve, each a life-giver, each full of possibilities.