

Lutheran Foundations: A Confirmation Curriculum[©]

It Starts Here! Stories of the Old Testament

The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish

Year 1, Lesson 3: The Fall and The First Family

Review of last week's lesson: Creation

- The Bible has two (2) creation stories that are HISTORICALLY IRRECONCILABLE with each other. They are different stories with different timelines.
- At MOST, only one of them can be "True History". It is impossible for them both to be historical records of creation. Each excludes the other.
- We believe that they are both "True". But real questions exist as to whether or not either of them is "True History" (A real, factual and accurate accounting of the actual timing and sequence of creation).
- They are probably best understood as true literature of some sort (Poetry? Liturgy? Parable?)
- These stories give us true answers to questions that we don't ask as long as we are struggling to see the stories as historical accounts:
 - Who created all that exists?
 - Who is God?
 - Who are we?
 - What is marriage?
 - What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
 - What should be the relationship between partnered people?
 - What does God think about romantic/sexual love?
 - What is our relationship to creation?
 - What are our responsibilities to creation?
 - What does it mean for us that God declared creation to be good?
- You are free to remain a Lutheran in good standing and believe:
 - that the story in Genesis 1 is a true historical account.
 - That the story in Genesis 2 is a true historical account.
 - That both of them are true, but that neither of them is an historical account.
- You are NOT free to insist:
 - that both of them are true historical accounts (because they are different) or
 - that someone else must join you in your beliefs in order to be considered a real Christian.
- For ourselves, our primary duty is to know and learn these stories in our bones so that we can perpetually MEDITATE on them.

- When discussing our interpretations of the stories of the Bible, our primary concern must be that we avoid scandalizing non-believers by insisting on things that they know to be false. This separates them from Jesus. That is a grievous sin.

New: The Fall

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die;⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

*"Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.*

*¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."*

¹⁶ *To the woman he said,*

*“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.”*

¹⁷ *And to the man he said,*

*“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”*

²⁰ *The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.*

²² *Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:1-24 NRSV**

Interpretive Path:

1. This is a story in the Bible. It is a true story – in some way! There is something true here for us to learn! Learn the story, know it in your bones, meditate on it day and night!
2. Make a decision about genre. What are you reading?
 - a. Almost certainly not an historical account.
 - i. Talking animals,
 - ii. a “serpent” that gets turned into what we would recognize as a snake as punishment,

- iii. God walking around with a regular body (Jesus says in John 4 that “God is Spirit”),
 - b. Technically, probably a fable (“A short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral” – Oxford dictionary) “Animal Farm” would be an example of a non-Biblical true fable – it is a searing indictment of communism that has never yet been proven wrong.
- 3. So we are supposed to be looking for true lessons instead of fighting about historicity! What would those lessons be?
 - a. We have lost the freedom and grace we used to have. We are broken now. We have fallen from what we were created to be.
 - b. Disobeying God brings death
 - c. Disobeying God brings a great increase in suffering
 - d. Disobeying God brings estrangement from one another (lots of blaming going on!)
 - e. Disobeying God brings estrangement from the rest of creation
 - f. Disobeying God ultimately brings physical death and the decay of our bodies
 - g. God’s rules are for our own good. Because God loves us, God gives us rules! The rules are a GIFT!
 - h. We want to be like God, deciding for ourselves what is right and wrong. This temptation is universal and ongoing.
 - i. Our mistakes and sins hurt other people and even hurt the creation!
 - j. There is an enemy that hates God and hates us.
 - i. That enemy whispers rebellion and sin to us
 - ii. Those whispers sound so very sweet and reasonable to us!
 - k. We must always and forever strive for obedience to God
 - l. God, in God’s mercy, limits the damage we can do and continues to care for us and to provide for us

New: The First Family

Genesis 4:1 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.”² Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,⁴ and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s

keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! ¹⁴ Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Genesis 4:1-16 NRSV*

Interpretive Path:

1. This is a story in the Bible. It is a true story – in some way! There is something here for us to learn! Learn the story, know it in your bones, meditate on it day and night!
2. Make a decision about genre. What are you reading?
3. This story could be read as literal history. A man named Cain killed his younger brother Able. We know that violence exists in many families.
4. There are some pieces of the story that make it more likely that we are to read this as a "true paradigm" (A typical example or pattern of something, a model)
 - a. Cain is worried that other people will kill him... which other people?!? Apparently there are other people in other lands! Cain moved to Nod and got married, had a family and built a city...
 - b. Cain is a farmer and Able a shepherd. We know that the domestication of animals and cultivation of crops happened after a long period of humans living as hunter/gatherers.
5. Either way, it's a true story about God and religion and family and temptation and violence and consequences and mercy.
6. A partial list of lessons:
 - a. Offerings to God don't work like a vending machine. Your heart needs to be in the right place!
 - b. We each have responsibility for our own spiritual life
 - c. We are not powerless against temptation. We have culpability.
 - d. Religious violence is very very old. Bad religion kills. If you find otherwise good people doing bad things, bad religion is almost certainly at the bottom of it...
 - e. "Am I my brother's keeper?" YES!
 - f. "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" – We cannot hide from God!
 - g. There are always consequences and mercy as God deals with sin
 - h. God still cares for us even when we really really really mess up!

Some of you may be really struggling as we think about these stories. You may think that I'm telling you that the Bible is not True. I am NOT telling you that. I think the Bible is true, and that the nature of any Biblical truth must be in keeping with its genre and context! The Bible is a written work of communication. Ordinary rules of interpretation must apply or we have nothing but the naked exercise of power!

We are the church that is actually paying intense attention to the words and structure of the Bible. If anyone is dishonoring the Bible, it is the people who have already decided what something MUST mean and who are importing their sensibilities into the text.

Will you receive the Bible and honor what is actually there or will you decide in advance what the Bible must be saying and insist on that? One of those paths goes off into the dark pretty fast...

In all of this, I am telling you to pursue truth, to chase after it, to demand unvarnished truth in its purity – and if that influences how we read and understand the stories of Scripture, so be it. We are the people of Jesus. We are the people of Truth. We are family and ally with anyone anywhere seeking truth.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” – Jesus in John 14:6

“If it ever comes to a choice between Jesus and truth, we must always choose truth, because disloyalty to truth will always prove in the long run to have been disloyalty to Jesus.” – Simone Weil

* New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright 1989,
Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches