

First Baptist Church of Augusta
“When The Home is No Longer Paradise”
Genesis 3:6; 20-21
June 21, 2009
Fathers Day

Genesis 3:6-7

*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.*

Genesis 3:20-21

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

Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “Every family has its stories.” You have them, I am certain – the crazy Aunt, the creepy cousin, the curmudgeonly grandfather. I have always been a bit fascinated with the DeLoach side of my family. My great-great grandfather was, according to family lore, a rascal. Once he shot the locks off the church door during a revival meeting. Another time, he was fined by a judge on Christmas Eve for swindling a neighbor out of fifty cents. He was a hard man, who lived hard, at times drank hard, and left stories, that today, we laugh over, but, I am sure during his time, were not so funny. Of course, he was not the only one in our family that was less than perfect. I cannot regale you with stories of a pedigreed lineage. My family tree was not perfect, and we still are not perfect.

How about you – do any of you come from perfect families? My hunch is, no. We all have experienced paradise lost.

Families have their history. They are not as ideal as we would like others to believe. There are court records, social embarrassments, skeletons and the like. There are shames and secrets, that we just do not talk about, and there are rumors, that just will not seem to go away.

Paradise lost.

Yet, we spend all our lives trying to convince others and also ourselves that all is paradise. On this Father’s Day, I ask you fathers, how many of you have perfect children? As babies they slept all night. In school, they made the good grades, never got into trouble, and you never had to worry about them. As adults, they are successful in their own careers, and are raising perfect families themselves - and all because you did all the right things in bringing them up, never making mistakes yourself. Life has been paradise for you.

There is only one problem. We lost paradise a long, long, time ago. Adam and Eve reflect a painful truth in all of us - from the earliest biblical testimony, families have been messing up - they have not lived as God created them to live. The story of paradise lost, is a father’s story. It is a child’s story. It is our story. At first, everything is resplendent and as near perfect as one can get. But, all too soon, something happens and paradise is forever lost.

When we realize that life is no Garden of Eden, we feel more like Adam and Eve - stripped bare and vulnerable to all of life's cruelties. That's the way it is on the outskirts of paradise. We look over Eden's way and we see the way things ought to be - perfect families, perfect lives, perfect careers, perfect moms and dads, perfect churches, with perfect ministers. But we are not in paradise.

Outside Eden, the world continues to strip things away from us. God reminded Adam and Eve that the world will be brutal at times, and God wasn't kidding. Eve lost one son - two when you consider that Cain was banished away. The Bible is just brimming with these dark tales of paradise lost: the floods, Egyptian slavery, calamity, near starvation, and endless wanderings and exiles.

This morning, I want to spend the remaining moments of what to do, when we find ourselves outside of paradise with our families. And by the way, that is the one thing we all have in common. We may not all be parents, or married, but we have a family. We come from mothers and fathers, some of us have siblings, some of us are married, divorced, remarried, or single. But all of us contend with the basic notion of family, even if it is only a memory.

Using this story in a pastoral way, I see three reminders when we find ourselves *outside of paradise*.

1) Live Within the Boundaries

There in the Garden of Eden, God provided for all their needs, but did set up boundaries and said, "You cannot go there." The story is an assertion that the recognition and honoring of boundaries leads to well-being. Choices have consequences.

A word to children - respect the boundaries that your parents have established. This is no less true for those of you with elderly parents.

A word to parents – respect the boundaries of your children.

It is as little as knocking on doors when they live at home

Treating them as adults, when they are adults

A good parent knows boundaries. We, as God's children should know this too.

In the Garden of Eden God set out places and said "you cannot go there." Yet, down through the ages, we find ourselves trespassing in places we ought not be – in marriage, in work, and so on.

2) Live out of Grace

In this story of *Paradise Lost*, we believers spend an inordinate amount of time dwelling on, what some call, "The Fall" and "Original Sin." Some of us approach life itself, as if we just exist under the sin of Adam.

This story is not merely one of how we have failed God, but how we survive, in spite of failure. Adam's naming of Eve is a touching example. She is called Eve – mother of all living – which, is in itself faith in life. We live on the outskirts of paradise, where things are not perfect - not even ideal. Yet, we continue to survive.

It is not about being smitten by God, yet, we too often go through life trying to "cover up," sewing on our fig leaves, hoping that no one will see who we really are. But read the story again: In our shame, in the nakedness of our sinfulness, it is God who stoops down and clothes us with love. (3:21) This is called grace.

Living as a family requires an attentive eye for grace. Do you see the grace moments around you? Look for them. We cannot fabricate them or even create them. We just need to be ready to see them.

Outside our house there lives an owl. We think he or she is nesting in a dead tree right at the edge of the woods. I never see the owl when I am looking for it. But every so often, the owl will swoop down to catch an unsuspecting critter and glide back into the woods.

In life, God's grace is like that. It happens where and when we often least suspect.

Families need to look for grace. *We see paradise lost all around – that is easy.* But grace, do you see it?

I was watching those grace moments happen all last week during youth camp: teenagers spending time to be with a new student, adults who gave up a week of their vacation and go with very little sleep, a well chosen word, spoken at the right time in worship, that would open up new possibilities. Grace.

Moms and Dads ... brothers and sisters, there will be times when we will turn creation on its head, where we fall away and fall short and fall hard. On Father's Day, we do not honor the perfect father, because there is no such thing. We come here to worship as creatures, who are far removed from paradise - from the way things ought to be – but, who are held together by God's stretch of grace.

Not only are we reminded to live within the boundaries and live out of grace, we are to...

3) Live in Meaning

We have heard it many times, but that does not diminish the truthfulness: *we don't always see the big picture.* I believe with every fiber of my being that life has meaning. We do not simply exist – born, live, and die; that's it.

I love the story of Ruth, in the Old Testament. One is tempted to assume that within those four chapters is a celebration of this foreign girl, who followed her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem, met up with Boaz, married, and lived happily ever after. But, it is not a story about Ruth. It's in the books' final eight verses where the story is really told – and it's a genealogy! Ruth gave birth to Obed, who is the father of Jesse, who is the father of David, as in King David. Nowhere in the book of Ruth are we told of this, until we read the ending. Ruth was a widow, hopeless, landless, and future-less. But there was meaning to her life.

When Paradise is lost, remember that with life there is meaning. But most of us don't want meaning. We want knowledge. The doctor gives a wayward diagnosis to someone we love, most of us don't ask the physician, why? We ask, what?

Eve's problem - and Adam's - was the desire for knowledge, instead of trusting for the meaning. Verse 6: *“that the tree was to be desired to make one wise.”* The word for wise, in verse six, connotes intelligence, knowledge, and expertise.

Knowledge is powerful; you can sometimes stop a child's endless protests by simply saying, "Just because." The information age is proving to be an era of great power. It's the same old problem of wanting knowledge in place of trust, and it is played out in a plethora of ways.

But life is not like that. Ask any father or mother worth their salt. There are things we just do not know. In the end, it will all have to be an issue of trust, that there will come some purpose, some greater meaning, some larger hope, that God knows more of the story than we do.

The gardener cares for his garden. The mother loves her children. In this creation story, God moves from being the *creator*, to that of the *preserver*.

When we remember that even when paradise is lost, there is meaning, We can accept the fact that we do not have to control all things. We do not have to know everything or control everyone around us, in order, as Eugene Peterson writes, “to be convinced that there is meaning and coherence and purpose and goal” (*Five Smooth Stones*, p. 109).

The Garden of Eden is not simply a story about how human beings fail. But, it is also a story of how we live. We live within **boundaries**; we live out of **grace**; and we live in **meaning**. “The God who created you will strengthen you.”

Even though we dwell outside of paradise, we must not forget the One who dwells with us. This One will remain with us, until he can one day bring us home.

Do you know the One?