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## **Eastminster Worship Services**

Sunday, August 23, 2009

### **Never the Same: When the Word Changes You**

#### ***Eyes Wide Open***

Genesis 3:1-24

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Eyes wide open; the first time I crossed the street without a parent with me after being told never to do so without one of them. Eyes wide open; when Carrie Prejean, a finalist in the Miss USA pageant, was asked on national television by a judge who happened to be a gay celebrity blogger what she thought about gay marriage. Carrie went against the politically correct answer of tolerance by stating that a marriage should be between a man and a woman.

Our eyes are now wide open. Why? Because of Adam and Eve's sin. Sin is at the root of life's predicaments. I am troubled that followers of Jesus have become seemingly numb to sin. We have believed the half-truth of the serpent that we will not die when we disobey God. Yes, our eyes are wide open, but we must now come clean with the full reality of sin. Sin is a killer. When God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over all the earth" things changed for man. Adam was created by God's spoken word and made in his image. Then, God did not think it was good for Adam to be alone, so he caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and created Eve from one of Adam's ribs. The Word changed man. It made Adam and Eve. And the Word can change you.

Genesis 3 continues the story of how the Word changes things. Genesis 3 and its main character, the serpent, appeals to the prohibition of 2:17, "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." This is the serpent's lie. The serpent also looks to the shamelessness of 2:25, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." The serpent inverts the truths ordained by God in chapters 1-2 and introduces a new agenda. The prohibition, which was a given is now presented as an option. The theological and ethical discussion that the serpent

has with Eve is not to serve but to avoid the claims of God. The serpent is the first in the Bible to be knowingly critical about God. The serpent is the first to be disobedient. Did sin first enter the garden with the serpent? What is God's relationship with and to sin and thus the human predicament?

Early Jewish and Christian commentators identified the serpent with Satan or the Devil. It is often asserted that the serpent is the symbol of the Canaanite fertility cults, illustrating the choice Israel had to follow Baal. The serpent represents an archetypal unclean animal. No lesser creature could be imagined to lead man away from his creator. Is the disobedient sinful serpent a God ordained means to a greater end?

“Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?” For the serpent, God is just the remote creator, not Yahweh, Israel's covenant partner. Eve corrected the serpent, but not accurately. The LORD God told Adam and Eve that they could eat freely from *any* garden tree except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve omitted the words *any* and *not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. Eve even adopted the serpent's description of the LORD God, describing him simply as God. Eve had moved toward the serpent's attitude toward God, one of distance, not as a covenant partner. The serpent told Eve that she would certainly not die by eating from the tree. Instead, her eyes would be opened and she would become like God. The serpent told a half truth. Adam and Eve did not die. Their eyes were opened, but they did not become like God.

Adam and Eve realized they were nude. Their eyes were wide open. They heard the LORD God walking in the garden. They hid. They heard the LORD God calling and asking them where they were. Adam did not lie. He told the LORD God that they hid because they were naked. God knew that they had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For if they hadn't, they would not have known they were naked. Adam blamed Eve, yet he had been with Eve during the entire discussion with the serpent. Their shame was overwhelming. Adam and Eve's eyes were wide open.

The LORD God questioned Eve. Eve attempted to shift the blame to the serpent. The original peace between man and the animals was shattered. Sin had disrupted that and placed alienation between the LORD God and man, men and women, and men and animals. The LORD God cursed the woman for

her disobedience by greatly increasing the pains of pregnancy and child birth. Eve's eyes were wide open.

The LORD God declared that the serpent would be the most cursed of all the wild animals. The LORD God declared that the serpent would crawl on its belly and eat dust all the days of its life. The serpent's disrespect for the LORD God by calling him God resulted in a curse that changed the serpent's life forever. The serpent's eyes were wide open.

Adam's offense consisted in what he ate. The LORD God cursed him, then, in what man eats. The toil that is involved in preparing the food for every meal would be the reminder of his sin. Work is not the punishment for sin. However, the hardship and frustration that is associated with work is the punishment. Before Adam's disobedience, the work of cultivating the garden was a joy. However, Adam's eyes were now wide open.

The LORD God made garments for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness. He also banished them from the garden, because of their sin. Because Adam and Eve ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the LORD God said that man had become like the heavenly beings, because they knew the difference between good and evil. Did the LORD God really say that Adam and Eve had become like them? Yes. They now had the ability to choose between the evidences related to good and evil and the impact of such choices on their lives and the lives of others. He banished them from the garden and placed cherubim in front of the tree of life so that they could not eat from it and re-attain their immortality. The LORD God forbade such an action and forestalled man's next steps towards self-divinization.

Followers of Jesus have become numb to sin, because we have believed the half-truth of the serpent that we will not die when we disobey God. Our eyes have become wide open. Adam and Eve wanted knowledge rather than trust. But God's plan to solve our predicament is one that still presides over the garden (the predicament). The rule might be overcome, but the Gardener is not so easily nullified.

As your pastor, my request of you is to name God as the Hebrews did, the LORD God. That is not generic. That is not distant. That is not indirect. The serpent called God, God. To call God, God, is

generic, distant and indirect. The Christian God is personal not distant. When we use the generic, distant and indirect manner to address God it lends itself to believe half-truths from the serpent. The half-truths are killing us. Disobedience causes death.

Our God is not a petty god who jealously guards holy secrets or who eagerly punishes the disobedient. This story of God's plan to solve your predicament is the anguished discernment that there is something about life which remains hidden and inscrutable and which will not be trampled upon by human power or knowledge. The predicament we find ourselves in is the anxiety that God's Word will not accomplish what it promises. Anxiety comes from doubting God's providence, from rejecting his care and seeking to secure our own well-being. Failure to trust God with our lives is death. To trust God with our lives is to turn from the autonomous "I" to the covenanting "Thou," from our invented well-being to God's overriding purposes and gifts.

Do you find yourself in a predicament like Adam and Eve? God has a plan to solve your predicament. Whatever the predicament is, God has the way out; the way for you to go. God's plan is spelled out in his Word, the Bible.

How do you begin to solve your predicament? Name the name of the God of the Hebrews, the LORD God as your God. By naming God the LORD God, you are recognizing that you were turned over to the sinful desires of your heart, the halve truths as Romans 1:18-15 states, but now you are set free. By naming God the LORD God, you are recognizing that you have not believed God's Word about who you are and how your predicament is to be solved, but have instead believed the words of false prophets and deceivers as Matthew 7:21-29 teaches.

How long will we believe the half-truth of the serpent, in whatever form he shows himself, that if we disobey the LORD God we will not die? Remember, because of Adam and Eve's sin your eyes too are now wide open. It is time for the leadership of Eastminster Presbyterian Church once again to declare with the saints of old that we will stand on the historic and apostolic truths of the Christian faith. At a worldwide gathering of Anglicans in New York City, Os Guinness a senior fellow of the Trinity Forum

said, “Liberal denominational leaders have followed to a fault Friedrich Schleiermacher’s plea that followers of Jesus reach out to ‘the cultured despisers of the gospel.’ Rather than reach them to convert them, the current church leadership has joined and become like cultured despisers of the gospel, no longer being faithful to Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

My assessment is that instead of affirming the historic and apostolic truths of the Christian faith, many followers of Jesus are tempted to cheapen the gospel by surrendering to modern insights, techniques and fashions as if we could become more relevant by doing the LORD God’s work in the world’s latest way and by its latest mores. Conservative followers of Jesus are consistently under pressure to capitulate to the ethical and theological mores of the modern world. Any form of capitulation and surrender to modernity’s philosophical assumptions and presuppositions is revisionism. The more we revise Christianity according to modern philosophical principles and thinking, we lose anything that is identifiably Christian. This capitulation and surrender leads to triviality, infidelity, *sola Cultura* instead of *sola Scriptura*, the severing of the continuity of the faith, the destruction of the credibility of the faith, and the obliteration of the identity of the faith.<sup>2</sup>

In order to counter this temptation to capitulate and to surrender, followers of Jesus must stand on the historic and apostolic truths of the Christian faith. What are those historic and apostolic Christian truths? The LORD God is personal and is known only through a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. People will not be saved unless they are told the good news of the gospel so that they can respond to the LORD God’s regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Sin is killing us and the only way we will be fully alive is to repent of our disobedient ways and proclaim our first love in Jesus Christ.

If you are able to admit that your eyes are now wide open to the reality of the power of sin, are you willing to repent? If so, will you please stand, if you are able, and respond to these questions?

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<sup>1</sup>Os Guinness, 08 September 2005 at a worldwide gathering of Anglicans in New York.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

*Through baptism you were joined to Christ, in his death and resurrection, and entered the covenant the LORD God established. In this covenant, the grace of the LORD God sustains and nourishes us and strengthens our faith in the gift of life eternal, which is ours in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself is our comfort and hope. It is he that brings us to wholeness of life. I ask you, therefore, to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we are baptized.*

1. Do you renounce evil, and its power in the world, which defies the LORD God's righteousness and love? Please say, "I renounce them."
2. Do you renounce the ways of sin that separate you from the love of the LORD God? Please say, "I renounce them."
3. Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior? Please say, "I do."
4. Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word, and showing love, to your life's end? Please say, "I do."

Remember, the enemy twists the truth; the enemy attacks our vulnerable spots and isolates us; the enemy wants us to fixate on sin; the enemy entices us to invite others into our sin. But, we will trust the LORD God to give us courage to renounce the half-truths of the serpent and live obedient lives after the purposes of Jesus Christ. Yes, our eyes are wide open. But, we know God has a plan to solve our predicament. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. Let us pray!

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