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In the Garden of Anxiety*
 Genesis 2 and 3
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May the God....

Alright, it's the start of Lent so let's just go to the beginning.

Let's go to the beginning—if it's not **the** beginning it's **a** beginning or at least **a** story of **a** beginning. A garden, four rivers, beautiful place, safari type animals, all well fed with no complaints; we have trees, we have plants, fruits, vegetables, plenty of much and of course, Adam, Eve, apples and a talking snake.

The problem with saying anything about Adam and Eve is that the literalists think it's all true and the liberals think there are no facts. We listen to the story, think we know how it goes and cease to hear what it means. The ancients told this story, this insightful, multi-layered story, to describe and explain how it is that discord came to be. How creation and humanity and humanity and divinity all wound up not living in synchronicity.

This primordial story of a beginning exists to offer to us a sense that the disconnects of the world and the flaws of our lives are not new. As theologian Karen Armstrong says, [The story of the garden of Eden tells of:] "A near universal conviction that life was not meant to be so painful and fragmented." Yet, Armstrong goes on to argue that most of the pain we experience in our lives stems from our sense of being separated and disconnected, from God and from one another.

The story of the Garden of Eden tells how a divide from God, a separation from each other, and a disconnect with the earth could come to be; it is a mythological tale filled with recognizable truths.

So, let's look again at this tale, to examine how it went wrong so maybe we can not so much rewind and undue all that has gone before, but rather understanding how it all came apart we can endeavor to keep it together a bit better, a bit longer this next time.

Poetry and myth do not have to be factually true, to speak a truth.

So—what then happened in that Garden? In that time and place of Eden?

Biblical theologian Walter Brueggemann, gives a compelling explication of the Eve, Adam, God and the Snake, in his Genesis Commentary, with nary a sexist or misogynistic claim. He says, "Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is a theological critique of anxiety. It presents a prism through which the root cause of anxiety can be understood. They seek to escape anxiety (P 53 Genesis Commentary). That is, Adam and Eve hear the snake's words,

“If you eat of that tree, your eyes will be opened and you will become like gods, knowing good and evil”.

Eat of that tree and you can be the one who understands all and you will be the god and you won't have to depend on anyone else again...you'll be the one who makes things happen. You'll be in charge...Somehow even then—that notion of being dependent—connected and not fully in charge—unsettles their souls.” It makes them anxious.

Think about it if you will, the times when you have sinned, when I have sinned, when we have erred, missed the mark, how many times did it involve you deciding that you could settle everything down in your life, if you'd just take some agency and control. Stop ditzing around with these other people, (frequently ones we love), but who are never as smart as we are in that moment.

How many times, do those willful take-charge actions lead to a disconnect with someone else? All because we're not so sure we can tolerate ambiguity in our lives anymore. How often do we act, just grab the apple and take a big old bite, and then pass it on?

This works individually and globally. Think about it: In Russia, how can we tolerate those people with a democracy, so close to our own borders. Those people living on lands that used to be ours, they will come and get us, so let's go get them instead. (A simplistic analysis of the war in Ukraine, but still it echoes a truth that is being held dearly by the Russian public.

Or what about politicians in the state of Florida, those black people, those gay people, why are they getting so much attention, they aren't like us, we need to stop their path forward or they will be in charge... “So don't say gay, and don't teach woke... and the world, our world will be better, less ambiguous.”

Or in our personal lives, we are involved, dating and now you know all about me, being fully aware of the good, bad, and ugly there is every possibility you aren't going to keep on liking me so much better for me to bail out now, while I can, otherwise you are likely to do that to me. I'd rather have that sense of control...

I better get out now...all because we can't stand the pent up energy, the anxiety of not being able to control the situation. We act, because we cannot contain ourselves. As my therapist said to me on more than one occasion, “Bonnie—don't just do something—sit there!”

What might have happened if Eve and Adam had replied to the snake, “It's a nice-looking piece of fruit. If you find it so appealing Mr. Snake, why don't you take a bite?”

Because here's the thing, acting, taking a bite and passing it on did not—in the least reduce their anxiety. Instead, it opened the flood gates.

They've eaten, they are now wickedly anxious and wildly aware of their nakedness. Suddenly the cool breeze on their rear ends is not refreshing. So, they string some leaves together in a literal attempt to cover their butts and they go and hide.

Just then God appears. Walking in the garden, during the breezy part of the day, (Genesis 3:8). Don't you just love that image of God strolling through creation with the wind in God's hair.

God calls out to Adam, "Where are you?" Does God do this because Adam can hide from God? And God just isn't up on the comings and goings of creation? Or as a midrash says, "Is God calling out—a way—to open the path for Adam to fess up to what they've done? Does God call out—to reestablish the relationship—regardless of the breach—because theirs's nothing like a heartfelt conversation to reduce the free-floating anxiety of our lives.

God comes to Eve and Adam, to start again. To personally tell them—how things are going to change, because there are consequences. But not impersonally decreed from on high—but in person—face to face. God could have changed their cosmic status on Facebook, but instead there's God—strolling through the garden doing God's best to restart, re-establish the connection.

You may be saying—well yes—but God still throws them out of the garden. Yes indeed—but the last thing God does for them—after placing the fiery cherubim at the gate. God sits down and makes them a decent pair of clothes. Takes out the needle and thread and replaces their leaves with coats of skins—something to hold up for the long haul. (Genesis 3:21). Because that's the thing—God is never going away. No matter what we do, how anxious we are, or how anxious we may become.. God will be there—calling us back into connection and relationship.

It's the first Sunday of Lent, friends but seriously its nothing for us to get anxious about.

Amen.