

God creates and furnishes a garden. And into it he places Adam and Eve. He gives them dominion over all of creation, prohibiting them from one thing and one thing only...to not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And, as Paul Harvey, always said, you know the rest of the story. God gives girl and boy a rule. Girl and boy break the rule. God punishes girl and boy. You know this inside and out, we've all heard it a thousand times before.

But what if we go below the surface? Is the agony in this story only in the shame of disobeying God? Or is there another refrain being sung, a dissonant harmony, an echo of another kind of weeping? Yes, there is something else there, in the background, something behind the grand drama of the Original Sin.

But what is it?

It is the silent screaming of Eve. It is a spiritually tortured Eve, who knows with *absolute certainty* what God told her...or wait, she *thinks* she knows what God told her...or wait, *what exactly* did God tell her...suddenly she's not so sure what God said...but why? What happened to God's word from the time it left God's lips to the time it reached Eve's ears? Who messed with the message?

Was it Adam? Was he the first husband ever accused of not writing things down? Can we blame Adam for tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit? No, as much as we might want to blame the man, we just can't. But just wait a generation, and then we can

blame his son for humanity's first murder.

Who then? Who got it wrong? There are only so many people to choose from, two really, after all, we're only seconds into God's act of creation.

So, if it's not Adam, then it must be Eve. And yes, the Bible clearly says that she ate that which God told her not to. But if the Bible is so clear, then why did she do it? Did Eve want to disobey God? No.

So what made Eve do it? Who tripped her up and made her fall? The Bible says Satan tempted her, also known as the Tempter. Although legend depicts Satan as a character in a red suit with horns and a pointy tail, he comes to her as a slithery serpent...and he wiggles his way into her head, where he has remained all these years...residing in the minds of human beings in every generation from that very first one to the present one.

And therein lies the torment of the human race. Our torment is not some snake slithering in the dust, and it is not some devil in red, but it is in the condemning voice inside the human brain...the voice of evil, made manifest in self-doubt, debilitating insecurity, self-loathing, the voice that convinces you and me that we are utterly worthless. You know that voice. And so do I.

And that voice in her head says this, “What exactly *did* God say to you? Did he *really* say that? Or do you just *think* he said that? Don't trust God, trust *me*.” And she does. Eve is no worse than you or me, we just blame her for messing things up because

she was the first to do the very same thing that the rest of us do each and every day, and that is to trust the evil voice inside our heads instead of the voice of God.

When I was a chaplain in Seattle, I worked on a psych ward where a woman was a resident, because she said a voice inside her head told her to kill her two grandchildren, and she did. I am not equating mental illness with the presence of evil, but I am suggesting the former is the result of the latter...Mental illness, a broken human spirit, conflicting voices in the very same head. How do we know which voice to listen to? We usually listen to the wrong one, because it's louder and makes more noise. We learn to tune things out, including the voice of God.

And this is tragic. Because if we stop listening to the voice of God, we don't hear his words of assurance that you are worth something, that I am worth something. If we stop listening to the voice of God, we convince ourselves that we are God-forsaken pieces of trash. If we stop listening to the voice of God, we believe we deserve to be abandoned. And then we feel utterly and completely alone. And that's exactly what Satan wants us to feel...which was why Eve was such easy prey...it's not like she had a mother she could seek out for advice, it's not like she had sisters and brothers to consult...

...she was alone, like that stray gazelle that gets attacked and devoured by the lion on Animal Planet. But Eve forgot one thing.

And that's that she wasn't alone. She had Adam...God even said, it's not good for a person to be alone, because God knows what the human brain does when it's left on its

own...That's why Eve screams silently in the garden, because she mistakenly believes she has no one to turn to. But she had Adam, yes, but she also had God...yet in her crucial moment, when the forbidden fruit is placed right in front of her lips, she hears only the voice of evil, telling her that God lied to her, warning her never to trust God again, causing her to doubt everything within herself that God had created good.

But the fabulous thing is, it doesn't end there, with a broken rule and an naked man and woman hiding from God in the trees...it doesn't end with Eve destroying God's perfect creation...it doesn't end with pain in childbirth or animosity between men and women...it doesn't end with Eve having a nervous breakdown or Adam beating her for disobeying God...the story ends with grace.

The story ends with God's will prevailing, not ours.

God's will is not for you to live a tortured existence until you finally die. God's will is for you to trust in the one who traded his own son's life for yours. God's will is to show you time and time again that he will never abandon you. That's why the story of the relationship between God and people doesn't end with today's reading...notice today's reading ends with God sewing clothes for Adam and Eve...today's story ends with a new beginning, and that is God's will for you, and for me, to create a new beginning, where we retrain our brains to listen to God's voice, which is calling into existence things that have not yet existed—new life and new love and new hope.

God never abandons. This story from Genesis clearly reveals to us what God's

will is for us—a permanent, everlasting, loving relationship with him, constantly recreating, renewing, restoring...God will never abandon, every single God-story ends with a new beginning. And so God's man and woman fail their first test and they stand before him, cold, naked and ashamed. God answers their shame with grace and says, “You're shivering. Let me make some clothes for you. I'll start sewing right away. Soon you'll be warm and we'll figure out our next step—together.”