

**Awaiting the Manger: Eve**  
LaGrave Christian Reformed Church  
Dec. 16, 2018 – Am Sermon  
Rev. Ruth Boven  
Genesis 3:1-20

In our advent series at LaGrave this year, we're looking at some Old Testament figures who are longing in some unique way for God's redemption to come. This morning we consider Eve. Let's read together from Genesis 3:1-20.

It's such a familiar story. It's such a beautiful beginning. Adam and Eve in the garden and it's Paradise. It's perfect. We imagine lush green landscape, vivid blue skies, and pure flowing water. We also imagine a sort of warmth and peace that comes from the very near benevolent presence of God. They were in Eden without fear and without the need to hide anything from God or from each other or even from themselves. Eve could look in a mirror without a twinge of concern over what was reflected there both outward and inward. For nothing in the garden was broken or damaged. Their cars had not a single scratch. Their bodies and minds carried no wounds or scars. Everything was whole and holy.

But as we know, things didn't stay that way. God, in the garden, had lovingly set a boundary for Adam and Eve related to the fruit of a particular tree. And they didn't honor it. Eve trusted the serpent's lie over God's good intentions for them and in that monumental moment, everything changed. Nothing in all the world would ever be the same. So, along with Adam, who ate too, Eve hid because suddenly she realized she now had something to hide. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam blamed Eve. And God laid out for them all the broken ways their lives and the world would now carry on. I don't know about you but I cannot read this story without feeling it viscerally. I feel it in my gut. I feel it as if I'm in the story because there is something so very familiar about what's going on here. You see what's happening here? What's at the heart of Eve's story is something every single one of us has experienced and that something is shame. Eve hides because suddenly she realizes she is exposed and she doesn't want anyone (not even herself) to see what's broken in her. Eve is awash with the painful, alienating experience of shame.

Brene Brown is an author who has written a lot about shame and vulnerability. In her book, "Daring Greatly", she tells one of her own shame stories. She sets it up by explaining that after becoming a sought-after speaker, she realized her schedule was far too busy. She needed to employ better boundaries around her time. But she didn't like saying no. She felt bad about it. It caused, what she describes, as the shame gremlins in her to tell her that she's not enough, that she doesn't really have what it takes to manage her work and life well. One day Brown received an email from a man who was really angry with her because she wasn't able to speak at an event he was hosting. She had turned down the invitation because it conflicted with a family birthday. The email was mean-spirited and packed with personal attacks. Rather than replying to the man, she decided she would forward it to her husband along with a little note telling her husband exactly what she thought about this guy and his email. Brown admits that what she wrote, could not in any way, shape, or form be considered a "good girl" email. Well, Brown hit reply instead of forward – so if you're not familiar with email – her note went back to the man and not to her husband as she had planned. The second her laptop made the airplane swooshing sound that it makes when you hit the Send button, she screamed, "Come back! Please come back!" She was still staring at the screen, totally immobilized by shame layered on shame, when the man fired

back a response along the lines of “Aha! I knew it! You really are a horrible person”, which fanned into flame a full-on shame attack for Brown, including dry mouth, tunnel vision, and the feeling that time had stopped in place. She was still struggling to swallow as her internal gremlins started whispering, “You see? You really do [stink].” “How could anyone be so stupid?”

Shame. It’s one of the most powerful forces influencing human life and behavior. And it’s for sure a bigger subject than what I can cover today. But I’ll mention a few things that are good to know about shame. Shame is different than guilt. Guilt is about something you’ve done. Shame is about who you are. Guilt is about regret over an action. Shame is about regret over your own personhood. Here’s another nuance to keep in mind. What the story of Eve tells us is that Eve’s shame, though not a good thing in itself, does point Eve to some critical self-awareness. What Eve learns in the garden is a necessary humility before God, the Creator, the giver of life. The serpent’s lie was that Eve was indebted to no-one and could run her life any way she pleased. What Eve learns instead is appropriate awe. It’s something we all must learn. Awe that says God is Creator and I am creature. I am weak and God is strong, but still God’s love for me is unshakable and his intentions for me are fully and always good. And that goodness signals a ray of hope in our broken story. For even before the sun went down on that day in Eden when nothing would ever be the same – a heart-broken God went looking, went seeking, went searching for the people he made and animated with his own breath.

You see, there’s a force in this world that is stronger than sin and the alienating shame we know too well. That more powerful force is the seeking, saving, forgiving, I-want-to-be-near-you-always love of God. It’s true, in fact, that all of Scripture, the whole biblical narrative, from beginning to end, has God moving toward us, not away from us. God keeps seeking and searching and coming near, no matter our sin, no matter our brokenness, no matter our personhood.

There’s a beautiful piece of art that gets shared around sometimes during Advent. It’s called “Virgin Mary Consoles Eve.” The painting is by *Sister Grace Remington of the Mississippi Abbey*, in DeBake, Iowa. At the center of the picture are Eve and Mary standing under a garden canopy of greens and fruit. They’re facing one another. In her right hand, Eve clutches a piece of fruit to her chest. But her left hand is extended and it rests on Mary’s left hand which rests on Mary’s extended abdomen. Eve’s shoulders slump a bit. Her long hair covers her body. Her eyes are cast downward. But Mary’s face is gentle and calm. Her eyes are directed into Eve’s face. And with Mary’s right hand she reaches out to console Eve, resting it on the side of Eve’s face.

It’s clear that Mary too has been visited by God. And Mary knows something that Eve could not. Mary knows that though Eve has broken something beautiful that’s not the end of the story. As someone noted about this painting, “Mary feels redemption in her body the same way that Eve feels shame in hers. Mary knows that it is going to be made not only OK, but right... [She] knows redemption is here, and it is an ocean of unquenchable love that all of the sins of the world can’t extinguish.” Friends, I can almost hear Mary whisper to Eve: *my soul magnifies the Lord*.

For what Mary knows is that the child in her womb is God with us. Taking on the flesh of our flesh. The bone of our bone. And what Mary will come to know is that her child became God in our flesh, in order to carry, in order to put on and bear our shame, all the way to the cross. Eve’s and our Advent longing is answered in Mary’s child, who by his incarnation, death and

resurrection, gives broken humanity new birth, a second chance, and enfolds us in a love that is strong enough to carry us out of our places of shame and into the light of his peace.

I was directed this week to a story about a basketball player named Chris Herren. He was once a rising star. As a high schooler in Massachusetts, Herren set the record for most points scored by an individual. As a senior, he was recognized as a McDonald's All-American and the Gatorade Player of the Year. It was a surprise to many when he chose Boston College, turning down powerhouses such as Duke and Kentucky. There was a magnetism to Herren, too. He was star on and off the court. That all changed one night during his freshman year when he walked in on his roommate and a girl huddled over some white powder he recognized as cocaine, and started to leave. As he turned away he heard the girl, a fellow athlete say, "Where you going? Come back, it won't kill you...I promise." As you might guess – it nearly did.

At first Herren was able to manage his addiction and his rising career. He got kicked out of Boston College, but was given a second chance at Fresno State though he was in and out of rehab. In 1999, he was selected by the Denver Nuggets and eventually went to play for the Boston Celtics. At that point, he was extremely reliant on painkillers and recalls giving free game tickets to kids in exchange for drugs. After just one year, the Celtics released him, and he went overseas to play, where he eventually opened his veins to heroin. As the years passed, Herren was barely holding things together. One day, high on heroin, he crashed into a cemetery fence. His wife was eight months pregnant with their third child. It was then, after surviving the crash, having accumulating four overdoses and seven felonies prior, that Herren finally got the help he needed, and got clean.

One day, well into his journey of recovery, Herren's wife walked past the bathroom where Herron stood looking at himself in the mirror while he was shaving his face. She said to him, "Oh you're shaving in the mirror again." You see for years – Herren had been brushing his teeth and shaving his face in the shower because he could not stand to look at himself in the mirror. I listened to an interview with the recovered Chris Herren who is now a man of faith and says that prayer, honest prayer before God is part of what keeps him on the right path and allows him to look at himself in the mirror and believe himself to be deeply loved.

So beloved of God, as we take another step toward the birth of our Savior, may each of us would be filled with appropriate awe. And may Mary's words that speak peace to Eve – also echo in your ears and heart:

*"My soul glorifies the Lord, sings Mary,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for  
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble. And  
53 He has filled the hungry with good things.*

Thanks be to God.

© Rev. Ruth Boven