

Did you notice that today's reading from Genesis started in the middle of the story? The stage is set and the drama begins in the opening verses that were not read. The location: a garden with all kinds of fruit trees in a place called *Eden*. The cast of characters: a crafty serpent, a still innocent woman and her still innocent husband; and, waiting off stage, the One called '*the LORD God*.'

The curtain goes up, the drama begins: *Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'* hisses the serpent. The woman responds, *'No, we may eat from any tree, except that one, in the middle over there. God said that if we eat its fruit, we shall die.'* The Serpent sows seeds of doubt: *'Do you believe that? Believe me—you won't die. God isn't looking out for you—God is protecting God's interests! God doesn't want you to become like God—wise, with eyes wide open, knowing good and evil. Look again at that beautiful tree!' The woman looked and saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes. So, she took of its fruit and ate... she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.* The fallout from their disobedience was swift and sure: their eyes were opened and they were wise, to be sure: *they knew that they were naked; and they sewed some fig leaves together to make loincloths.* Enter *shame*, center stage.

The drama continues in the Lesson we heard. The LORD God enters the garden and walks in the evening breeze. The man and woman hear the sound, and *fear* and *guilt* join hands with *shame*. The *wise, eyes wide open* couple hides in trees. The LORD God calls, *Where are you?* and asks, *Have you eaten from the tree?* Enter *blame!* The man tells God, *the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate.* In other words, *don't blame me, blame her—and blame yourself as well.* To the woman, the LORD God says *What is this that you have done?* She, too, points the finger of blame: *I was tricked by the serpent (whom you put here, implied) and I ate.*

The *shame*, the *guilt*, the *fear*, and the *blame* come together and point to the tragic consequences of their disobedience, their sin—the reality that God's good creation is now broken!

If we listen closely not only with our ears but with our hearts, we sense deep down that this story is not merely a story from the past about the past. We know in our minds and feel in our bones that it is our own story that is being told. It is the uncovering of *our* nakedness: *our* fear, *our* shame, *our* guilt, and *our* blaming. It is the drama of a broken world—a drama now lived out in the story of our own broken lives.

We are well acquainted with the broken pieces within us—those pieces that we might be able to hide from others but cannot always hide from ourselves, much less hide from God. We live in the fractured places in our relationships with those who at one time were close to us. Some of us know how our promise of *'til death do us part* was shattered long before a divorce court made it official. Perhaps you, like me, bear the pain of estrangement and loss within your family or with one-time friends—a son or daughter or mother or father where all connection has been severed; where through betrayal or just indifference your once *bff* is no longer your *best friend* at all. Sadly, some

brokenness might not be healed this side of eternity. All these broken signs come together and point us to the ultimate brokenness with God.

The story that begins in Genesis is far greater than just the story of a broken world or our story. It is the story of LORD God—thank God. Throughout the drama—from the opening curtain in Genesis to the final scene in Revelation—God is the main actor, the One who always stands front and center on history's stage. The LORD God's purpose, from beginning to end, is not to condemn and punish the disobedient, including you and me, but to heal the broken, comfort the fearful, forgive the guilty, set free those who are trapped in the blame game, and reconcile those estranged. God's ultimate goal is that God's love and forgiveness, *God's grace, extend to more and more people*, until all the world knows firsthand that with God *there is forgiveness... steadfast love and plenteous redemption*.

The whole movement of Scripture—and of history itself—is the drama of God working ceaselessly toward this goal. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, a variety of characters enter and exit the stage while God remains the one constant in the story. The drama reaches its fullness in the coming of the One we find *center stage* in today's Gospel. People were saying *he has gone out of his mind*. Jesus' family *went out to restrain him*. The religious scribes from Jerusalem declared that *he has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons*. The drama continues as Jesus goes about the land teaching, preaching, healing, and even raising the dead. He winds up on a hill outside Jerusalem, hanging on a cross. There, before he breathes his last, Jesus prays *Father, forgive them*. But the Jesus drama did come to an end on a cross or in a tomb, for God raised him to life. On that day of resurrection, Jesus came and stood among his fearful followers and said, *peace be with you*. At dinner that same day, he *opened the eyes* of two disciples at Emmaus as *he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them... and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread*.

God's story was not finished that first Easter day, and the drama continues in our here and now. Our stories have been crossed (+) by the Jesus story—and that is great Good News. God, who created the man and woman out of the dust of the ground and gave them life, has re-created us in the waters of baptism as God's daughters and sons and has given us new life. Now, here at 7500 Greenwood Avenue North, Jesus comes and meets us in our gathering. Jesus says to you and me, *peace be with you*. At this table, Jesus takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and speaks the words, *This is my body, given for you*. Jesus takes a cup and says, *This is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin*. The God who clothed and fed the wayward couple in the garden has clothed us with forgiveness in baptism and feeds us at the table with the bread of life. The One who came and called the man and the woman then continues to come and call us to remember and to be who we are—the children of God.

So, children of God, sisters and brothers, what do we do? Do we dismiss Jesus as *out of his mind*--or at least as irrelevant in today's world? With his family, do we seek to restrain him--to let him out only in church but not set him loose in our world and in our lives? Do we, today's religious folk, say that Jesus has an unclean spirit? By no means!

So again, brothers and sisters, what do we do? Jesus gives us the answer in today's Gospel. He tells us that his brothers and sisters—God's children—do *the will of God!* It is easy for us to say but discerning what *the will of God* is in our lives is hard, and the actual doing God's will is harder still. I invite you to struggle in the days ahead to discern what it means for you to *do the will of God*. I can't personalize a list for you—I can barely figure out *the will of God* for my own life. I can suggest some places to look for hints. Open your Bible and look at Jesus—his life, his ministry. See who are welcomed at his table. Note his compassion in action for the lost, the least, and the littlest. Next, look at the needs of your neighbors, your community, and your world. Look at today's news as it tells of families torn apart by heartless laws; remember sisters and brothers with no jobs, no income, and no place but a car, doorway, tent, or shelter to call home. See those labeled *out of their minds*, be aware of the sick and the addicted. See those whom Jesus welcomed then and still welcomes today. For the power to do the will of God, always keep in touch with God in the Word, in prayer, at the table, and in community.

Finally, pay attention to the words we will soon be singing: *will you come and follow me, will you care for cruel and kind, will you risk the hostile stare, will you let the blinded see, will you set the prisoners free, will you kiss the leper clean, will you love the you you hide, will you shape the world around?* And be especially careful when we come to the final stanza. Be careful, because if you mean what you sing, *you will never be the same!*