

SERMON: The Original Sin
TEXT: Genesis 3:8-15

6-6-21

I've been watching episodes of the Netflix series called *The Crown*. It is the story of Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain. It begins when her father, the King, is sick and he is preparing her to take the throne when he dies. She was 25 years old when she was crowned.

From the beginning, it is the scandals that take center stage. The Queen's sister, Princess Margaret is having an affair with a man on the Queen's staff. A married man. They are in love. So the Queen sends him away to another assignment in another country in hopes that their absence from one another will *not* make their hearts grow fonder, but will make their fondness fade away. She does this, not out of concern or affection for her sister, but because of the rules and the reputation of the royal family.

Prince Philip, the Queen's husband, also plays a role in various scandals, partly out of jealousy and resentment that he has a very small role in the monarchy.

Yes, I'll admit, I am intrigued by all the drama and misbehavior, even though much of it is fiction - or at least embellished for the entertainment factor. But there

are also historical elements of the show that I enjoy learning about. Some of it I remember, but only bits and pieces. So it's interesting to learn about people like Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher and discover some of the issues behind England's position regarding apartheid in South Africa. So I often come away from an episode understanding more fully the events of the past.

Perhaps what's most fascinating to me though, is how the Crown, the Monarchy, always takes priority over everything else. Rules must never be broken, no matter who is hurt by them. And every member of the royal family seems to be a prisoner of the crown, rather than a beloved husband, sibling, or child. The scandals come as a result of their loneliness, their misery, and having to pretend to be someone they're not. It is not genuine affection or the familial relationship that holds the family together. It is duty and obligation.

And then I turned to today's passage from Genesis about THE ORIGINAL SIN. The world is new. Creation is in its infancy. And the Creator seems to be enjoying it all like a mother and father basking in the glow of their newborn baby. In a leisurely evening stroll through the garden, God discovers the man and the woman hiding from him. God calls out, "Where are you?" The man answered, "I

heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

God then pointed out that the only way that the man could have known he was naked was to have eaten from the tree which God had commanded him not to eat. The man - committing the true original sin! - immediately points to the woman. “She gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” So, God turns to the woman, asking, “What is this that you have done?” Then the woman points to the serpent. “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

Of course, we all know that THE ORIGINAL SIN committed by the first humans, was disobedience to God. God said, “Don’t,” and the minute he left them alone, they did. And then they knew they were naked. And they knew they were in trouble. And even though they had to know that God would find them, they hid. And then they failed to take responsibility for their own actions. They passed the blame to someone else.

Seems like there’s a lot more sinning going on here than just a bite from a piece of fruit.

Because that fruit came from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the man and the woman now know more. They know the difference between good and bad. They know the difference between clothed and naked. And I think they also know - or at least feel it in their bones - that knowledge is power. Power over each other. Maybe even power over God. But when they hear God approaching, they hide.

Do you see what's happening here? One commentary I read suggests that the real sin is not the breaking of a commandment, but a betrayal of trust and love. God trusted the humans and they broke that trust. And it only gets worse from there. Now they have secrets. Now they have fear. Now they have reason to hide. Now they know shame. The relationship between God and humanity is harmed. They become alienated from God. Estranged from God.

And when the man and woman begin to blame each other, they are harming that relationship as well. Each is seeking to save himself at the expense of the other.

Another commentary extends the idea of broken relationships even further. Referring to the sin committed by the man and woman, "This human

decision...disrupts not only their own lives, but... that of the entire cosmos as well, issuing in disharmonious relationships at every level.” (The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 1, p. 368)

Frederick Buechner described the power of sin as *centrifugal*. “When [sin is] at work in a human life, it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and pieces go flying off until only the core is left.... Sin is whatever you do, or fail to do, that pushes [God or another person] away, that widens the gap between you and them and also the gaps within yourself.... *Original Sin* means we all originate out of a sinful world which taints us from the word go. We all tend to make ourselves the center of the universe, pushing away centrifugally from that center everything that seems to impede its freewheeling. More even than hunger, poverty, or disease, it is what Jesus said he came to save the world from.” (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking; A Theological ABC*)

Sin is whatever separates us from God. Whatever gets in the way of our relationship with God. Whatever distracts us from God. Whatever tempts us away from God.

Twentieth century theologian, Shirley C. Guthrie wrote, “What the law of God requires is *ourselves* (our hearts, to use the biblical terminology), not just certain external actions. And what [the law] forbids is the withholding of ourselves, not just the doing of certain bad things.... Doing things which in themselves may be quite proper, but doing them without love; or *not* doing these things which love requires – this is disobedience to the law of God.”

Going back to *The Crown*, it seems to me that the monarchy works in just the opposite way. Love is not the focus, not the goal, not even a priority. In one scene, Prince Philip is talking with Princess Diana who is feeling like an outsider. He says, “Everyone in this system is a lost, lonely, irrelevant outsider apart from the one person - the only person - that matters. She (Queen Elizabeth) is the oxygen we all breathe, the essence of all our duty.”

So much for the fairy tale of marrying a handsome prince, wearing a tiara of priceless jewels, and living in a palace. The reality is that the prince is only handsome on the outside, that the priceless tiara comes at great personal cost, and that the palace is a very cold place to live. It’s no wonder they are all looking for love somewhere else.

Back to the garden. Whether it was an apple or another type of fruit, the real ORIGINAL SIN was much bigger than just taking a bite. THE ORIGINAL SIN was that feeding their own selfish desires for knowledge and power became more important than their relationship with their Creator. THE ORIGINAL SIN was thinking they could hide from God, or escape responsibility by blaming someone else.

Part of restoring our relationship is remembering the Holy Spirit is the oxygen we breathe, and our Creator is the essence of all our love. When we accept the free gift of God's son, and strive to love as he loves us, we are moving in the right direction. Jesus is the mediator who connects earth and heaven. Jesus gave his body and blood, he laid down his life to become the bridge that brings us back to God. As we commune with our fellow sinners at his table, we are nurtured and strengthened and reconnected to our Lord and to one another - God's people of all times and places.

The journey back to God starts at this table. Let us come and be fed... to the glory of God!

AMEN.