

## Eve and Sarah: The Birth of the Original

*A Sermon By*

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The enduring value of the story of Adam and Eve is not scientific nor is it historic. The enduring value of the story of Adam and Eve is the birth of the original human predicament; the existential dilemma. And what dilemma is that? That dilemma is how we remain human in the animal kingdom. The human predicament is just this: what does it mean to be human? From the story of Adam and Eve we learn that we are made from dust, made like the animals except for one thing—the breath of God animates us. We are made in the image of God and yet, we are not gods. We know a great many things but such knowledge awakens us to just how unlike God we are. Oh there has been for a few decades now a persistent superstition pedaled by new age shamans; this superstition would have you believe that you yourself are a god; that we are all of us gods; and if we just get educated enough, or buy the Secret, or tap into some meditative slipstream (no doubt spiked with the perfume of vanilla candles) that we can attain to such godlike stature. This superstition crashed into the rugged

cliffs of human nature in Cambodia, in Bosnia, in Rwanda, in Darfur. The laundry list of terror and war is long and it includes we who live in America. New Age acolytes cannot account for the ferocity of human inclinations to genocide. The canine teeth that lay hidden just beneath our lips. The cup of darkness we

carry within us and insist upon anointing ourselves with. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of the original and originating human condition.

Framed within the Genesis narrative is the original and originating theodicy. *Theodicy* is a theological term that means “the justification of God.” So when a theologian offers a theodicy, s/he is offering a defense of the belief in God as loving despite how red in tooth and claw the world is. What kind of God creates a cosmos and places in the midst of it all a habitable planet, a garden, only to allow it to be overrun by weed and thorn? The poet, William Blake says it well in his poem, *Tyger*.

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful  
symmetry?

...

When the stars threw down  
their spears  
And water'd heaven with  
their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb  
make thee?

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful  
symmetry?

The world is beautiful, complex and interwoven at depths that defy our

best efforts to explain. The world is horrific, sewn by injustice and cruel in ways that defy the power of speech to make sense. These themes are found in Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve. Many of us have missed this because we have been misinformed by literalist and prosaic preachers who insist on making the bible a science textbook. It is not. Fear not: because it is not a science book, it does not follow that it is deficient in Truth. On the contrary. We have missed the struggle in Adam and Eve's story because we have been listening too long to preachers who haven't read a biography in their lives insist that this is biography. It is not. It is a narrative written in a remarkable way so as to penetrate the surface silliness that passes too much for our lives and our living. The birth of the original human context is one in which people fashioned in the most remarkable way—what Blake calls this "fearful symmetry"—end up doing the most terrible things to one another. And that is not all. It is a narrative that asks us to struggle with our relationship to the Creator of it all. How are we to be human? Why are we closed off to the very One who breathed life into us? Those are the most important questions. Dostoevsky knew this and filled his novels with immense writhing of small souls. Cormac McCarthy knows this when he writes in his book, *No Country For Old Men* (now in movie theaters starring Tommie Lee Jones), about a man who is running for his life and running away from his life, Llewelyn Moss. He has taken off with millions of dollars stashed in a brief case he found. It's not his money. It belongs to a drug cartel and a ruthless madman is determined to kill him.

Moss ends up having a conversation with a nineteen year old woman he meets along the way. She is starting over by changing her name and moving to California. Moss says to her:

You think when you wake up in the morning yesterday don't count. . . You might think you could run away and change your name and I don't know what all. Start over. And then one morning you wake up and look at the ceiling and guess who's layin there? [p.227]

Cormac McCarthy named his fugitive, Llewelyn Moss. He could just as easily named him Cain. Look with me at that story in Genesis chapter four:

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD."<sup>2</sup> Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,<sup>4</sup> and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?<sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you

do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

<sup>8</sup> Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field."<sup>b</sup> And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" <sup>10</sup>And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup>And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

<sup>12</sup>When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." <sup>13</sup>Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!

<sup>14</sup>Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me."

Perhaps it seems odd to you that on the First Sunday of Advent, the pastor is preaching on the primordial fratricide of Cain and Abel. But think of it this way: what significance has the birth of Jesus for we who live in this world? In a few weeks, we are going to celebrate the birth of the Christ who came to redeem the world. Redemption implies corruption. From what are we being redeemed? Nothing less than the birth of the original, the

existential predicament of humanity and indeed the cosmos. The Apostle referred to this original and originating context when in First Corinthians he wrote, "*for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ*" [15:22]. The fratricidal nature of human beings; alienation, anger, hatred and warfare are twined and gnarled like the twisted roots of some ancient tree. Cain the fugitive prefigures the alienation of the human race—he kills his own brother. The original fugitive, he is symbolic of the alienation that resides in the hearts of all of us. What is this alienation? It is the inability to see yourself in your brother's face; it is self-hatred projected onto someone very much like yourself, but someone who seems to have succeeded where you have failed; alienation is the hubris of thinking that the world simply popped into existence, that it is comprehensible without reference to the One who created it; it is the delusion that I can hide from God and when found out, ask God a question with an obvious answer—*am I my brother's keeper?*—as though God would not know the answer to that question. Alienation is running from myself as if myself could be left behind. We might want to hear Llewelyn Moss' advice to his sidekick. No matter where we run away to, we can never get away from ourselves. We wake up and look at the ceiling and guess who is lying there?

If the birth of the original, the human dilemma and predicament is foreshadowed in the story of Adam and Eve then the story of God's efforts to redeem us originates with Abram and Sarah. In Genesis 12:1

we find that call and see Abram's response:

<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."<sup>a</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him.

history. Through faith and obedience, through the birth of children and the courage of parents, God meets us. This is why the cry of a baby in a manger in Bethlehem will waken the world to the birth of hope. A devoted peasant woman named Mary would give birth to a holy child who in turn, would break the grip of sin, overcome the alienation of our hearts, and offer us entrance into the kingdom of God. He too would be the birth of the original. Amen. ✕

The Apostle Paul notes in his letter to the Romans that this faith and obedience of Abram and Sarah was what led to their righteousness. Eventually Sarah would give birth to a son named Isaac and of course, she became the grandmother of the patriarchs. The salvation history of the Hebrews began there, with the obedience and faith of Abram and Sarah and would extend through the birth of Isaac and into the patriarchs. If you were to read the genealogy of Jesus provided by the Gospel of Luke, the third chapter and 34<sup>th</sup> verse, you would find the names of three great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is fair to say then that the birth of the original and originating redemption begins with Abram and Sarah in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis.

What do we take away from this study of Eve and Sarah and the birth stories they provide? God has chosen to interact with us within the clockwork and matrix of human