

## Family Portrait

Genesis 3:8-15; Matthew 4:1-11

### Slide: Mom, Dad, Uncle...

They seem to stare out at me, these early portraits of my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. When viewing pictures of all kinds for my Mother's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party two summers ago, I remember vividly this trip down into my own heritage. I was putting together a collage for her birthday and wanted to include pictures of her childhood and early adulthood.

All of the early and oldest portraits that have been handed down to me are in black-in-white, as color pictures had yet to be invented. There is a photo of my Mom with her brothers and sisters, the look of the Great Depression about them as they prepared themselves for living at an orphanage. My Mom didn't

want that picture so she gave it to me. It was not a good memory for her but I wanted the picture to remember some of my history and hers.

And then there is a photo of very still, non-smiling men and women from the pioneer days, who somehow are connected to me - they are of good north German stock. And then there is the photo of my Mom and Dad, their wedding picture.

### Slide: Wedding photo

My aunt Margaret, who later became my godmother, stands next to her sister, my mother, as the matron of honor, younger than I can remember ever having seen her. And, next to my Dad, an army buddy stands there, who Dad never heard from again after being stationed in Korea. The pastor is behind them all, somber and serious. He was the army chaplain on base.

The fashion of the day stands out. Long wedding gowns were not fashionable when my Mom got married and my Dad wore his army

uniform; in fact, the kind of wedding we go to today, with all the planning, money, tuxes, and dresses, simply isn't in play in this wedding portrait. My Mom and Dad simply got married, and this portrait was the one and only one to show the blessing of that day.

**Slide: self portrait**

Family portraits are unique. They let us glean some knowledge about where we have come from. I'm certain that you can easily think of a family portrait of your own right now, whether it is a portrait of your immediate family, or of great-great grandparents just coming to this country.

As a pastor, I have come to recognize how a family history can really shape a life: hopes, dreams, successes, loves, losses, unfinished business, family secrets and mysteries, all of these and more filter down through the system of a family. Reliving some of these family histories can easily be done just by looking at a family photo.

**Slide: Adam and Eve**

But there is another family photo that affects all of us and that we are a part of, albeit a metaphorical one. Just imagine the scene of a garden, a man and a woman hiding behind bushes afraid yet also aware of what they just did, like a child's hand being caught in the cookie jar. This family history can be very easily seen, as the man adamantly points to the woman in blame, and the woman adamantly points to a serpent.

No one in this family portrait is willing to accept responsibility for their actions. It is a portrait pointing to the first sin: Call it shame, call it disobedience, call it self-preservation, the first sin is actually is a pretty obvious one – it is the belief that we don't need God. It is the belief of self as primary and only. It is broken relationship. And, it's something we all carry within us even when we deny we do, even when we put on the façade to others that we don't.

This family photo of Adam and Eve, the first to be described as family in the bible,

shows us the deep roots of our inherited history. We, like our family before us, tend to blame others to divert attention to our own place in story. And, our inability to admit that we have the brokenness of sin, to admit that we ever do anything wrong, we point our finger away from ourselves, believing ourselves much more innocent than the ones to whom we point.

Eve and Adam represent our ancestors, our family histories, our family portrait, the portrait that represents the fact that although made in God's image, our greatest flaw is that we forget we are. Instead of defining ourselves as loved by God, being worthy and whole, and in so doing fail to love our neighbor, we instead define ourselves how we want to, how it best serves our interests.

Yet, even as we stand in the garden, knowing that we have a condition that tempts us to be beyond who we really are, God still decides to enter the human story. Remember that God didn't have to. God chose to.

Even as Adam and Eve are leaving the garden, God is making clothing for them, entering their lives and caring about their sudden knowledge of their limitations. Their disobedience to God is not the final word, because God loves the family God created, as God did say that the human creation was...good, not sort of good or fair. God's intention was that all of it, including ourselves, would be very good.

### **Slide: Ashes and palms**

Here we are, suddenly in Lent. The ashes barely washed off our foreheads from Wednesday, the reality that we can't always have the Christmas Eve angels, peace on earth every day, along the way forgetting why Christmas needed to happen in the first place. For even as we run out of people to blame and finally blame God at the cross, we still have a God who enters our lives, sewing our new clothing so to speak.

With the rapid descent from the mountain top and the transfiguration of our Lord from last Sunday, we enter the

wilderness with Jesus, to see him tested not unlike the original family of Adam and Eve. Fully human and completely starving, we witness Jesus achieve what Eve and Adam could not; that is to understand exactly who is to blame yet still take the full force of the blame anyway, knowing exactly what that will mean for him crucified.

**Slide: wilderness**

You know, a lot of times where we read or hear the Gospel for today as a story only about temptation, I think we lose out on the whole point. It isn't always about us and our ability to thwart some temptation in our lives, but rather, the story is about God and what God is doing. The temptation story of Jesus in the wilderness tells us something very important, and that it is proof that God can and does defeat evil and sin. Although the ultimate sacrifice comes at the cross, it is the power that Christ has over Satan that is ultimately the lesson here. And, in this story, we see that Christ does defeat Satan the Adversary. That is important

for us to remember when we are in the wilderness and being tempted ourselves.

Not to say that the temptation will not return to us, that we will stop the blame game and the initial shame of disobeying God at the garden. But, we are never left alone and we are given a way not only to escape sin forever, but to combat it all the more in this life. God will help us and according to this story, God does through the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus enters into all this, exchanging the brokenness of our own upon himself. The Apostle Paul explains this best in his letter to the Romans Chapter 5:

**“Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that,**

**just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."**

**Slide: Arms**

So, our family portrait not only includes the first humans who sinned, but the One who is without sin, the One who took all the blame for sin, even though he was innocent. This true family portrait enables us to see our history as it truly is: created to be good, loved, and forgiven.

So, when you look at your family portrait, do you see Christ in it? He is not there physically, but he is there nonetheless. Even as we share the same ancestry as Adam, we also share with Christ.

**Slide: 40 days of Lent**

During this time of Lent, we reflect upon the fact that we need God, that healing of sin comes through confession, truth-telling, and repentance, in order that reconciliation and restored life might be possible.

I know many think, "It shouldn't be that easy." Well, it wasn't. For our family to be restored, we needed the death of our Lord, something that God didn't have to do but chose to do despite our disobedience.

I pray that this 40 day journey be blessed with self-examination for all of us. With ash on our foreheads, we move on to Jerusalem and beyond to the empty tomb, to love the Lord God with all our being, and to remember that we are called to love the most vulnerable as well. God's garden still needs tilling and keeping, and it is our responsibility to do so with great care. May God's gift of including Christ in our heritage enable us to care for God's beautiful garden all the more. Amen.