**Sermon Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-7**

SCRIPTURE SUMMARY AS INTRODUCTION

This morning we find ourselves in the midst of the unfolding creation story. Here, God has set A’dam, meaning “from the soil” in Hebrew, on the earth and has provided a partner for him, Eve, meaning “to breathe” or “to give life”. So, both A’dam, *the earthling* and Eve, *the life-giver*, are called by their Creator to care for, nurture and cultivate the sacred space provided for them. To be stewards.

The Creator has positioned a tree, in the midst of their sacred garden, that stands as a reminder of the delicate balance between obedience and curiosity, ignorance and wisdom – ‘The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.’ And the Creator warns both A’dam and Eve that partaking of *its* fruit would bring forth undesirable consequences, even death.

So, here in chapter 2 we have this warning, and then jumping to chapter 3 verses 6 and 7, we witness a climactic moment in the creation narrative. A’dam and Eve, after finding the words of a serpent persuasive– and feeling the desire for wisdom, *for* a knowledge of good and evil, latent within them– act *impulsively* to acquire that wisdom in short-order. Perhaps to see if there was indeed a short-cut to God-like insight, as the serpent had indicated.

And “in an instant their eyes are opened,” so the story goes. But…instead of being bathed in the warmth of newly bestowed divine wisdom…very human fear sets in.

* They become intimately aware of their own vulnerability *without first* developing the resilience and inner strength to harass that vulnerability.
* They become deeply aware of the ways in which they differed from God and God’s perfection, *without first* coming to peace with their imperfection and fallibility.
* and they were confronted the stark reality of their own nakedness – physically, emotionally, and spiritually, *without* first taking a lifetime to learn acceptance of their own bodies, their multiple and often conflicting emotions, and their ever-discontent spirits.

LINK

Friends, to me this ancient story, is a story about humanity’s quest for wisdom *and* their impatience in developing the *long* resilience that life and living requires in order to gain such wisdom…such knowledge of good and evil…that comes from experience and in community with those with different experiences than our own.

STEWARDSHIP SERIES

Our theme this stewardship season is “Because of you, our church changes lives.” It is the theme, the statement, that all our UCC congregations are considering at this very same time.

And what that statement –“Because of you, our church changes lives”– raises up within us is the question of “how?” or “in what way…does our church, St Andrew United Church of Christ change lives?” “What contribution do *I* bring to the whole, do *you* bring to the whole…to the table…that has the potential to change lives?

Pastor Lori introduced last week the notion that “Because of your commitment to creating a space where people can BELONG, our church can change lives.” And that “When we do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God, our church changes lives.”

This week we have placed candles our table. These are a symbol of WISDOM. Divine wisdom, yes, but also the wisdom *you* bring to the table…because of *your* life’s experience, and *our* collective wisdom that is brought together as we gather and discern what St Andrew’s will be about *now* and in the *future.*

I believe our collective wisdom can open our eyes to new ways (like a candle in the darkness), revealing to us new perspectives, new ways to approach both the good in life as well as the bad. Wisdom, as you recall from our creation story, is knowledge of *both* what is good *and* what is evil. Knowledge of the celebratory and joyful as well as the sorrowful. A’dam and Eve’s eyes were opened to the reality of life, of the beauty and the brokenness, the light, and the shadows. But they were ready to process it, given the expedient nature by which they came about their awareness.

LINK LITANY

Wisdom, as our biblical story reminds us, is hard-earned and by necessity cannot be gained by taking short-cuts. So…

* we set our table with wisdom *convinced that by doing so* we can become a community that values the long quest for insight that comes through living life, and living life in community with folks that have difficult joys and struggles than our own.
* We set our table with wisdom *convinced that* the knowledge gained throughout the years is beyond value. So we celebrate the voices of centenaries and of children.
* We set our table with wisdom *convinced that* when our minds our changed to embrace new perspectives, we are all enriched. So, we look to other faith traditions, to poets and artists, to testimonies of people of color, trans- and cis- people to listen and learn, what the world looks like and feels like from their perspective.
* We set our table with wisdom *convinced that* as individuals we cannot know everything, but together we can know more, so with humility we seek to grow in curiosity and wonder.
* We set our table with *wisdom convinced that* in doing so the hardships and grief we endure in our lives are not the end of our stories, but that the wisdom of others who have walked the same (often) impossibility dark paths, can bring about the light of hope for another day.
* We set our table with wisdom, during this stewardship season because **when our eyes are opened to new ways and when we embrace hope, our church CAN change lives.**

INTERFAITH PATHS TO WISDOM

Wisdom is a theme throughout the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, not just in the creation narrative of Genesis. In the eighth chapter of Proverbs, Wisdom is personified and given a voice which declares “God created me at the beginning their work, I was the first of God’s acts of old” (Prov 8:22). In the Hebrew Bible, wisdom is more than knowledge or intelligence, it is a principle created at the beginning that *offers guidance and hope* to humanity. Jewish thinkers, reflecting in part on the Hebrew scriptures, saw wisdom as a principle at the center of the moral and physical order of the universe.

In the New Testament Jesus is closely associated with wisdom. Luke writes about the boy Jesus in chapter 2 of his gospel account that “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40).

In the Qur’an wisdom is used to describe the revelation that God shares with prophets and which guides humanity. One Islamic thinker (Swiss Muslim Frithjof Schuon) saw wisdom as a category that both transcends and unifies different religious traditions.

APPLICATION

A’dam and Eve, in their desire for wisdom got more than they bargained for. Yes, they gained knowledge of the good, but knowledge of evil flooded into their mind’s eye too. And isn’t that what happens to us as well?

Yes, it may indeed be easier to go through life blinkered, focused in on just our own little plot of land. And there are many times in our lives where *all we can do is* keep our eyes focused on the concerns nearest to home. *But as followers of the Jesus-Way* we have a bigger calling upon our lives that demands that our eyes be opened. That our awareness deepness, that our concern enlarges, and our compassion expands. So, perhaps the question we can ask ourselves this season, as we discern what we will bring to the table of our resources, is how can we build up our resilience and strength to be faithful to our call to change a suffering world?

For the instant we look up, and we become aware of the tragedy around us, it ought to move us to action. It ought to drive us into the storhouse of communal wisdom, to discern what the most loving, just, and merciful action might be to alleviate the vast needs we see all around. It ought to motivate us to intentionally pool our resources, our skills, our time, our money and our wisdom so that transformation has fertile soil in which to flourish and grow, and bring about positive change in this world, at every scale.

Yes, *it is* easier to avoid the news both local and international. *It is* easier to avoid complicated conversations about conflict in Palestine and Israel, about earthquakes in Afghanistan. *It is* easier not to wrestle with the issues of houselessness in Louisville, or the inequity of cash bail, or the school-to-prison pipeline. We can honestly have a much quieter life if we don’t think about the climate crises, environmental degradation or air and water pollution.

CONCLUSION

A’dam and Eve lived in complete bliss before their eyes were opened and they experienced fear and shame and felt vulnerable and embarrassed. The desire for wisdom opened their eyes and now they saw not just the beauty around them, but also the brokenness, the light *and* the shadows. Beforehand, they lived in a state of blissful unawareness, shielded from the complexities that lay beyond their limited understanding.

Then, by seeking knowledge, by desiring wisdom, they gained a fuller perspective. They saw not just the astonishing beauty of their existence and the world they inhabited *but* became self-conscious of the ways they didn’t match up to the perfection they saw in the flora and fauna of the garden, or of the perfection they sensed in their Creator.

And they were ill-equipped to deal with it. To move from the insight that wisdom immediately granted them, to the hope that wisdom can bring over time. Their awareness came before they had developed the skills, the life experience, and the community to do anything about it.

But we…knowing their story…on this second week of our Stewardship Series we set our table with wisdom, *and with* hope.

Even though, hope feels elusive in the presence of pain and loss but is so often born out of the strength of having lived through hardship. Hope is when you drag yourself to church because you know that *in here* you can be reminded of the supremacy of love in God’s beloved community. Hope is knowing that you belong here, that you are not alone, that when you feel weak and downtrodden that there are people who care deeply for you and will pray for you and lift you up. Hope is the thing that can magnify the light of wisdom. **When our eyes are opened to the world as it really is and when we embrace hope, our church CAN change lives.**