

## Children of God

A sermon for Lent 1a — March 1, 2020

St. Andrew Lutheran Church — Franklin, Tennessee

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11 — Julian Gordy

Have you ever visited in a home (or lived in one) in which children and parents weren't clear about their roles? Such a home is not a happy place. "Take out the garbage, Son," ceases to be a simple request followed by an appropriate response and becomes a fifteen minute negotiation which ends in yelling or sulking and bad feelings. In such a home where there is a confusion of roles, nothing happens easily or without distress.

In a home, as in most human associations, things run much better when there is clarity about rolls. In the best homes, of course, leadership is exercised in cooperative, collaborative ways rather than autocratic and heavy-handed ones. Everyone gets a chance to participate in making decisions and organizing life together. But when it comes down to it, somebody has to be the parent and be respected and obeyed as such. Because when that doesn't happen, chaos reigns and there is no happiness at home for parents or for children.

Over and over again in the Bible, the relationship between us human beings and God is described in the metaphor of children and parent. And from the very beginning, our first lesson today shows us, we children have not always been content to take our proper place in the family of God.

The serpent tempts Adam and Eve, twisting God's words: "So, God says you can't eat any of this lovely fruit. Too bad."

Eve corrects, "No, we can eat all the fruit *except* the fruit from this one tree."

"Oh, you know why that is, don't you? That's because the fruit of this beautiful tree will make you wise; and God doesn't want you to be wise. If you eat this fruit, you will be just like God. You can make your own way. You can be your own boss."

Evidently this line of reasoning convinces Eve and, later, Adam that maybe they don't have it so good after all. Maybe God isn't so benevolent. Maybe God has

been keeping them down, using them, preventing them from living up to their full potential. The trust they have heretofore had in God erodes.

So they eat the fruit. But their new freedom isn't exactly what they had expected. The relationship of perfect harmony with God and the world is broken. They hide from God and, in shame, from each other. Now they are rebels, wanting authority and power they can never really have. Eden is done for.

That has always been the problem for us children of God. We creatures have not been content to be beloved creatures. We have wanted to be God. But that's like a two-year-old trying to run the household. We're in way over our heads! And what a mess we have made of it! Look at this morning's paper: Because of our greed, envy, bigotry, hatred, violence, and apathy, the human family is in a fair state of chaos.

It has been like that for centuries. We beloved children of God have hated each other, fought with each other, made war on each other, mistrusted each other, misused each other. Some of us beloved children of God hoard up what we don't need while other beloved children of God go without even enough to feed their families.

Our human household has become unruly and unpleasant to live in because, fact is, we are not capable of being God. But we keep on trying to be in charge rather than being content to be the much loved creation of God that we are, living as God has taught us to live.

In short, once again this year at the beginning of lent, we find ourselves turned in on ourselves rather than turned outward toward God and our neighbor as we were created to be. Luther, and before him St. Augustine, said this turned-in-ness is sin. And it is humanity's oldest and most basic problem. We want to put ourselves at the center of the universe where God belongs. We want to look out for ourselves alone and not for the rest of God's beloved family.

But good parents love even misbehaving children. And because God loves us anyway, in order to get us out of the mess we have got ourselves into God became

one of us in Jesus, himself both Creator and creature. A human being. A person just like us except that, unlike us, Jesus was not turned in on himself.

Like Adam and Even in the garden, as he began his ministry, Jesus was tempted bypass his humanity and usurp God's role. In a nutshell, the testing goes like this:

- 1 The devil says to a very hungry Jesus who has been fasting in the desert for days: "Hey, you're God. What are *you* doing hungry. Use your power to make yourself some food out of these rocks. The Son of God shouldn't go around hungry."

But Jesus came to live a life like ours, and he will not use his divine power for his own purposes. He will not take a shortcut to feed himself. Later he will feed a hungry multitude, but he won't do it for himself.

- 2 Then the devil asks Jesus to prove his trust in God by jumping from the temple tower. Such a miracle would be spectacular, the stuff they cover on the 6 o'clock news. People would see the show and follow him willingly. Jesus wouldn't need to do the hard work of preaching, teaching, healing. He wouldn't need to suffer and die. It would be easy. It would be effective. Show 'em what you've got!

But again, Jesus refuses to take the shortcut. He will not demand a miracle from God because to be human is to live without regular miracles, isn't it? If Jesus is to experience fully our humanity, he must, like us, trust God even in the desert, even when there is reason to doubt, even when God seems silent or absent.

- 3 Finally the devil cuts to the chase: "You are here on earth to get the people of the earth to follow you. I can give you that power right now. You can be what you were made to be right now. Forget the suffering you know is coming in Jerusalem. You don't have to endure the scorn and the scoffing. You can have a kingdom without the cross."

But Jesus will not worship as God what is not God. He will not serve another for the sake of easy glory.

And so, Jesus passed the test Adam and Eve failed. St. Paul wrote to the Philippian church: “Though [Jesus] was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.”

The temptation to put ourselves in the place of God, to put our self in the center, to put our own will in the place of God’s is the temptation that is at the heart of all human temptation.

We may not be tempted to worship the devil in some Satanic ritual, or to turn rocks into French bread or to throw ourselves off the top of the St. Andrew tower, but we often fall to the temptation to put in God’s place that which is not God: money, popularity, power, career, family, nation, ideology, entertainment, and especially our own selves.

It has always been like that here in the human family, where we children want to be the parent, to make the rules, to run the show. Even though history and the morning paper give ample evidence that running the show is way beyond our pay grade!

Every year at Lent, we have 40 days to think about all that, 40 days to walk with Jesus, 40 days to think deeply about what it means to be creatures of a loving God, 40 days to learn to live together joyfully as the beloved children of God we are. This year I am blessed to be here with you on this lenten journey.

Return to the Lord, your God, we sing at Lent. For God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Love for you, for me, for all us children of God. Amen.