

From Fall to Hope
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer M. Gingras
September 11, 2016

Genesis 2:4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8

It was quiet, maybe too quiet. Darkness had long since closed in like a thick blanket. Inside, the house was as dark as the night itself.

In a room upstairs, she lay sleeping under warm, downy covers. And dreaming.

She dreamed of a green, leafy garden.

She dreamed of a waterfall, powered by a mountain stream, cascading from a cliff high above into a clear pond full of small fish and lazy turtles.

She dreamed of trees loaded with ripe fruit: apples, pears, pomegranates.

There were colorful birds, singing and stretching their wings, and a cool breeze blew through it all.

He was in the dream too. Together, they ran through the garden, laughing and singing, playing hide-and-go-seek like a couple of kids. They climbed the trees and ate the fruit. They swam swim in the clear water and splashed by the waterfall. They rested in the warm sun and listened to the sounds of paradise surrounding them.

They sat down, together, for a picnic of sorts. They stretched out, relaxed, and took that one bite....

Suddenly, the sky grew dark. Trees began to shake and drop their leaves. Birds were suddenly silent. The wind sounded like a voice shouting at them, warning them...

Just then, she woke up. The night wind had blown her bedroom window wide open, it chilled her to the bone. She jumped out of bed and ran to the window, slamming it shut. She looked at the clock and climbed back into bed.

Three in the morning and she lay wide awake. Feeling restless, she went downstairs to fix herself something warm to drink. She took one sip of the chamomile tea, and shuddered. Needing something stronger, she found where he hid that pint of whisky and poured a generous portion into the mug. She took a deep breath in. Now, that was better.

She sat at the table and thought about her dream, the green garden, the cool breeze. She thought about herself and her husband, and how the young man of her dreams had become the middle-aged man of her reality.

Once, they had all they ever needed. Enough food, enough drink, enough work, enough money, enough friendship, enough vacation time, enough love. Peace of mind. They had each other.

But they wanted more.

Once, they lived surrounded by beauty. They could run when they felt like running, sleep when they felt like sleeping, eat when they felt like eating.

But they wanted more.

They didn't just want the beautiful garden to live in. They wanted to own it. To control it. More.

They wanted to do whatever they wanted whenever they wanted, to make their own rules, to know the reason why. More.

It had become their obsession... their only thought and desire. More.

Until. . . until it all came crashing down. One beautiful, sunny, not-a-cloud-in-the-sky day... the towers fell. And they lost everything. Everything.

They lost the garden. They lost each other. In some ways, they even lost themselves.

In reaching out for all they could get... they ended up with nothing.

She sipped her drink and thought about that day they left. She thought about the man sleeping upstairs and what he had done and what he had said. How he blamed her for the whole mess. "This Woman," he said, "who YOU gave me."

She knew he blamed her for his own screw-up. And it wasn't fair. Wasn't he man enough to take responsibility, to take his own share of the blame without throwing it on her shoulders?

The blame left a hole in her heart. They were destined to live the rest of their lives always wanting more, dissatisfied with what they had. Restless. Always blaming each other.

She took another sip and thought about their children. Yeah, they had all learned well from good old mom and dad, how to grab for more. They knew how to win, how to capitalize on the situation, to shift the blame, to shove it off on somebody else. Anybody else.

Abel, the beautiful child, the golden boy, the one who wanted everything and somehow managed to get it. He was the oldest. Abel, who never seemed to make a mistake. Until the day he went for a walk with his brother. It was his first mistake, and his last.

Cain, the middle one, who wanted everything his older brother had and blamed him when he didn't get it. Cain, who knew that if he could just get rid of his brother, it would be all his. He would spend the rest of his life wandering the earth, carrying that terrible load of guilt for what he had done. He could unload the guilt if someone would do to him what he did to his brother. But no one ever would.

Yeah, Eve and Adam had taught them well.

They could see it best in their youngest, Seth, and his children. Generation after generation, they would always want more. They would steal from each other because they wanted more. They would fight wars, family against family, skin color against skin color, religion against religion, nation against nation, all because they wanted more.

And if it didn't work out, they could always find someone else to blame! Blame the government and its corrupt politicians. Blame the church that never seems to have the answer they want to hear. Blame the school for not doing enough to fix the next generation. Blame the 24-hour news cycle. Blame their families, their next-door neighbors, their bosses, their dog, those immigrants...

Yeah, Eve and Adam taught them well.

And they would go on learning. Power and winning are everything. The weak and the poor and the lazy deserved what they got. The greed, violence and fear was like some kind of disease, a sickness passed from one generation to the next. Would it every stop?

Eve finished her drink, set down her cup in the sink and yawned. Maybe if she could just put her feet up in the recliner for a few minutes she could get back to sleep. Maybe she could reenter that dream, the one that would always stay just out of reach, like an ancient memory placed in her heart so, so long ago.

Eventually, she dozed off.

But this time, she dreamed a strange, new dream. Gone was the man who ran through the forest and swam in the pool and climbed the trees.

He had been replaced with a laughing man on a hill, who was teaching elders and children, telling stories, sharing fish and bread. She looked at this teacher, saw the callouses on his hands and the dirt on his sandals, and realized just how far he had come. She saw the love he had for her (and for everyone in that crowd) and wondered... could he be the one to get them back to the way things were?

She knew where it had all gone wrong.

Every time her children responded to one another with violence born of fear, every time they used their power to take what didn't belong to them, every time they unleashed the dogs of war, they took another step away from Paradise.

He held her gaze for a moment, and said, "Enough."

This man could teach them how to return – how to love God, their neighbor, even themselves... he could help them unlearn all that they had learned.

Then the sickness, the disease that Adam and Eve had passed to their children, and their children's children could be cured.

Then one day he could take them all by the hand and lead them back to that garden. Back to the dream.

Because there is enough hope, and love, and kindness and goodness in this world. More than enough. Amen.