



LESSONS IN LIVING

What We Can Learn from the Creation Myth in Genesis

“Part 3 - Eve: Giver of the Life and Wisdom”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
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Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:18-25

Then YHWH said, “It is not good for the earth creature to be alone. I will make a fitting companion for it.” So from the soil YHWH* formed all the various wild beasts and all the birds of the air, and brought them to the earth creature to be named. Whatever the earth creature called each one, that became its name. The earth creature gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals.*

But none of them proved to be a fitting companion, so YHWH made the earth creature fall into a deep sleep, and while it slept, God divided the earth creature in two, then closed up the flesh from its side.*

YHWH then fashioned the two halves into male and female, and presented them to one another. When the male realized what had happened, he exclaimed, “This time, this is the one! Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh! Now, she will be Woman, and I will be Man, because we are of one flesh!”*

This is why people leave their parents and become bonded to one another, and the two become one flesh. Now, the woman and the man were both naked, though they were not ashamed.

** YHWH represents the divine name found in the Hebrew text. It represents the Divine Mystery and, traditionally, is not pronounced. Instead, we say “God” or some other term of reverence.*

Sermon

Well, we're obviously looking at a passage that has brought so much violence in the world against women. What I discovered, not so much in my classes of seminary, but working in hospitals, is that people don't choose bad religion to be mean. They don't know how to make their world work.

And when there aren't teachers who are able to speak that vocabulary, if all the smart people just leave that conversation, then people are stuck to their own devices. And a lot of times worse than that, given religions that just simply don't work. They're pre-Darwinian, they're pre-Galileo. And they're also very narcissistic to the male priests who put a lot of the stuff together.

I would like to think that we've outgrown this. And I think that a lot of progressive churches just try to do religion without bringing these kinds of things up. But when people are building on that foundation, we can't just ignore it. We have to challenge it.

So today we're going to look at three lies that the Church has told about women through history, and think about diffusing them. Obviously, it doesn't just affect women. This is also where much of the homophobia comes from.

The Church kind of learned a lesson with Galileo: Don't use the Bible to try to prove astronomical facts. That doesn't work too well. People laugh at you, and well, they should. *[laughter]* But however dumb it is to insist on the sun rotating around the Earth... It's not only dumb, it's tragically mean and cruel to use first-century science on human beings.

The Catholic Church has been doing a study on ordaining women as deacons. Now, one of the things that normal people who aren't preachers *[laughter]*, and actually most preachers, too, don't realize is that the Bible was more inclusive at the start.

And then the translators took over, particularly when it got to Europe. Translators started changing things. For example, they would translate the same word as minister for a man and deaconess as a woman. And the Catholic Church won't even go that far.

After studying this situation for years, it was a board of five women, five men. The men were priests. It was a five-to-five tie, so they just threw it out. That counted as the defeat to the notion that women can do ministry. Some of the statements have been really eye-opening to me from this group. *[puts on glasses, looks at notes]*

This is from the Papal Commission. This is why you ladies shouldn't apply... Because like the magic water, you wouldn't understand that. And the magic crackers... *[laughter]* I don't know why God chose me to be your boss. *[laughter]* I'm a very humble, very humble man. Sorry if there's a little hostility there and then. *[laughter]* *[reads notes]*

The masculinity of Christ, and therefore the masculinity of those who receive holy orders, is not accidental, but it's an integral part of sacramental identity.

Then another priest said,

If you take away this beautiful imagery of Christ and his bride...

The Church. Christ. The bride.

Where, of course, the head is represented by the clergy...

Of course, of course. I mean, what's more masculine than priests and clergies? That's why we can wear the big hats and the sparkling dresses. *[laughter]* That Liberace would say, "Hey, I think you've gone too far."

So the Church is a bride. And what he called beautiful nuptial imagery. [reads notes]

The result of rejecting this imagery, is theological transgenderism.

Yeah, so that sounds objective to me.

When you build on a bad foundation, even good people can do really evil things. Fox News has proven that. If you give people bad algorithms from which to try to discern what's going on, it'll warp the information they try to take in.

I won't keep going with the quotes because it's depressing. But some of the most important work we do is transforming that language. That's why we have inclusive language that we use here. But that work is never over. Right? Science keeps growing. We start understanding more and more things about human beings.

If the Church doesn't change, then it brings the old evils back for a new generation. And that's where we are now. Even progressive churches don't realize that we've been given this false foundation: That there's a natural gender hierarchy, and that morality means submitting to that hierarchy.

I saw a statement, not from the Papal Commission, but saying, "*If a hen crows like a rooster, kill it.*" [murmurs] Now, if there were a natural gender hierarchy, you wouldn't have to do that. Right?

If there were a natural gender hierarchy, you wouldn't have to enforce heterosexuality on everybody. Women wouldn't be expected to shave their legs. To try to make the difference more pronounced if it were not *subtle*.

So we're going to look at three things the Church has said about women through the ages. If you cannot- say no when the Bible is wrong, it's better if you never pick the book up in the first place.

Jesus said love is the interpreting device. If an interpretation helps you love, then that's the right interpretation. If it makes you cruel or unjust, either you're wrong or the Bible is wrong. How many times has the Bible been wrong? But we're not supposed to talk about that in church.

But it's very obvious that it's a wonderful gift from the past, but it's got some really crazy places. There's a lot of crazy places in it. One of the crazy places is when it says that woman came out of the man. The word 'woman' means 'from the man.'

Has anybody here studied any biology? [laughter] That's the opposite of the truth! Even though we know that in terms of the chemical stuff, a lot of us still think of the male as the primary representation of humanity. When the truth is a woman of color is the true representation of humankind.

I think it's okay to have guys. I kinda like being a guy. But we come from the female, not vice versa. Sanity *requires* that we revamp how we talk and think about these things. Anybody who's

ever worked with feminists, and I've worked with feminists all over the country, it doesn't take too long to realize they're the ones that need to drive the bus.

Guys are really good at tunnel vision. I'm really good at that. But there's been so many times when something would happen, and I would lower my head like a goat to try to, you know, push against it, and the group would redefine what was happening. It takes all of us, but we need to do a drastic shift to shared power.

A long time ago, there weren't that many pro-choice clergy, pro-gay clergy. So I got invited to all kinds of places I had no business going. [laughter] Molly Ivins used to have parties at her house, and you'd have people from all over Austin that would go to these things.

But I would always slip away to her library to try to figure out where this mind is coming from. Those were very happy moments for me, but I'm a monk.

So there are people like Mary... What's that? [a woman in congregation says "Wollstonecraft"] Wollstonecraft. Mary Woll-stone-craft. An incredible genius. Very, very early feminist who said this. [puts on glasses, looks at notes] You have these men like being courteous and treating them like the weaker sex. She says,

Weakness may excite tenderness and gratify the arrogant pride of man.

Now see, that's a little uppity. [laughter]

Weakness may excite tenderness and gratify the arrogant pride of man, but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a noble mind that pants for and deserves to be respected.

Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship.

Now, when we look back again at the story of the Garden of Eden, Eve is taken from the rib. [gestures to side] That's obviously not correct. At the same time, what it's saying is she's not taken from the head to be the ruler of the man, not taken from the foot to be the servant of the man, but from the side to be the partner. That's pretty good for a long time ago in these patriarchal cultures.

It's not good enough for us now. [pause] So the first idea we need to dispel is that the woman emerges from the man in any way, shape, or form. And all the stuff of Michelangelo, and all this stuff we have with the man as the model of humankind, needs to be reframed. Because the model, starting with conception, the default is female.

Charlie Kirk may have been wrong. I hate to say it. [laughter] How many people have been wrong using the Bible to argue against science? How many times does it have to happen before we realize that's not what the book is for? So the first thing we need to let go is that idea of somehow male being the center of things, women as a derivative of helpmate.

Then the second is the idea that she was disobedient, and therefore humankind has been punished. The name Eve, in many reckonings, means "mother of all life". What we're probably looking at is something from the goddess religions that are being reframed.

Even progressive theology will sometimes talk about Mary Magdalene being a partner to Jesus and this kind of thing. But you can't have a male God and a female friend and balance the cosmology. Eve is not rebellious. She's strong. She's independent. She takes responsibility for her decisions.

This is the same lesson as Pandora. Pandora is told not to look in the box. She disobeys, and hope comes out. In Hebrew, the word for wisdom was female. Jesus talked about Sophia all the time, quoted the mystic sayings of Sophia.

If we see Eve as an early expression of that feminine wisdom... And it's not even feminine, it's the core humanity of a person. And to realize that's what gets us in trouble. Because our mind is willing to sell out sometimes, and there's something inside that won't do it, that has to stand up, has to be human.

So I think what it's saying is wisdom is one of those priceless gifts we can have, but it's very costly. It's very costly to be wise.

Mary Wolltoncroft. [sic] Wollstonecraft. I'll get it by five o'clock today. [laughter] Her daughter was Mary Shelley. Who wrote *Frankenstein*. And the theme in *Frankenstein* is that technological genius that goes crazy because it's not harmonized to nature. I think that's the spirit of the story of the fall in Genesis.

It's not that we want to be stupid and put the fruit back on the tree, but just to realize that once we live in our judgments and our discernments, we've fallen out of the web of life. And we have to build our way back in to it.

Howard Zinn- Am I remembering his name right? Yeah. Don't get old, ladies and gentlemen. That's the lesson today. [laughter] This is Howard Zinn. He didn't live long enough to see the MAGA movement, but he saw it coming. [puts on glasses, reads notes] He said,

Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of leaders, and millions have been killed because of this obedience. Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty, and starvation, and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and the great thieves are running the country. [murmurs] That's our problem."

I love that A&M has now prohibited the teaching of *Plato's Symposium*. In that mythology, they start off as male and female together, and then they cut them in half. That's what the translation was trying to act like Genesis says. It doesn't say that, but that's a whole lot better start.

But the story really isn't about male or female. It's about humanity in the cosmos. That's what the mythologies, the great mythologies, are about. And we *misuse* them when we think they justify anybody's oppression.

The third lie that's there in Genesis, and much of scripture, and much of literature, the thing that you can't really put your finger on, is that the story of Genesis is written through the male gaze. It's written from a male point of view.

And that's the problem when you talk to a sexist. They don't realize they've been taught they're better than you are. They're probably not even conscious of it much of the time. If you say that to them, it hurts their feelings. Then they think you attacked them.

Racism is the false belief that because you're white, you have this superiority over other people. That if people would just be like us, everything would be great. Conversely, much of embodied oppression is a false sense of inferiority.

We all have to learn not to look at women as though they were created for men. If I say that a woman is beautiful, I'm saying that from the perspective of the male gaze. I'm saying she's beautiful to me. It's a subtle thing, but it's seeing somebody as an object for the male. [pause]

In the story, Adam gets to name all the animals, including Eve. The person that gets to name people has a power that no human being should have. Nobody on the face of the Earth was created to serve someone else. If we don't understand that, we don't understand Christ.

And when we defend the structures of oppression, we are renouncing Christ. When we put America first, we are renouncing Christ. When we put patriarchy, or white supremacy, over our human family, we are renouncing Christ.

Mary Wollstonecraft. I'm slow, but I get there. [puts on glasses, reads notes] Talked about that sense of being beautiful to a man and what that can do. She said,

Taught from their infancy that beauty is a woman's scepter, [the crown or the staff of importance] the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming around its gilded cage, seeks only to adorn its prison.

2020 vision, right?

My hope today is to realize that the myth of the fall, and it is a myth, was not intended as an excuse for political oppression. It's a myth about humanity in the Cosmos. It's wisdom coming through our native humanity, which is feminine.

It's realizing that the *core humanity* would be a woman of color. I mean, if you were to take representative example, it's not a white guy. Bad news for me. But it really isn't bad news for me. Because until I stop oppressing other people, there's a part of my own heart that's dead. And every oppression I renounce sets me free.

No one on the face of the earth was created to serve someone else. And Eve is an example not of rebellion, but of strength and self-determination. Because obedience to the creative principle of the universe also means rebellion to every unfair hierarchy which tells you to be less than you are.

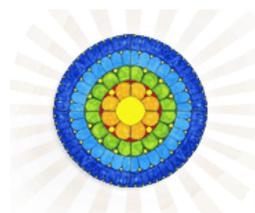
Well, that's my struggles with the text. This will give you a minute to think about how you would understand this text.

Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

I want to remind you that each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. I also call that spirit by many other names. But that spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. We've had a lot of heart skinnings for some time now. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. We've had a lot of tears. So go out in this wonderful creation and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

14311 Wells Port Dr.
Austin, TX 78728
512-251-0698
admin@staopen.org