

Of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
Sunday, March 1, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown,
Iowa

Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17

Introduction: This morning we're going to do a little group exercise involving Lectio Divina-divine reading. The first step is "lectio" listening carefully and reverently to see if a word or phrase stands out. It may be that we simply pointed our attention at that phrase, but perhaps the Holy Spirit is drawing your attention there. The first step is to listen to the passage and see if something stands out.

Next we listen again to the passage and we meditate on it. To borrow a phrase from the Gospels, we "ponder it in our heart". Imagine a cow chewing cud. That's an ancient image of someone meditating on Scripture. You're not trying to draw any conclusions or applications at this point, just try to let the passage sink into your consciousness.

The third step is "oratio", in which we pray about the passage as we read it. After we read the passage for a third time, we'll share what is on our minds with the congregation. The last step is contemplation; we ponder the phrase and consider what it is saying to us. What do we need to do about what's on our mind? Better yet, what do we need to know about what's on our mind? Much of Scripture is there not so much to tell us what to do but to tell us what to know; to tell us what the Lord is like. If anyone wants to share a thought or two, that would be great. Then I'll share a couple of thoughts and then we'll have Holy Communion.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Our lives are like a garden

Even in the garden there were dietary laws-there is a value to self discipline

First, I'd like to share a couple of thoughts about the passage that came to mind. The first is that a garden can be a fit analogy for our lives. Even Jesus and the church are characterized as a vine with branches, and like a garden we must tend to it for it to thrive. The second is that even in the Garden of Eden there is forbidden fruit. Even at the beginning of days there was dietary law. But I'll leave those thoughts for another sermon.

This tree represented human autonomy

Corporate

What I'd like to comment on the analogy of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as representing human autonomy separate from God, similar to the Tower of Babel. And that can be corporate as well as individual. By corporate I mean that we can progress in ways that lead us to results unintended and unwanted, if we don't think about them in a moral, if not theological sense. Awhile back I read a novel called "Never Let Me Go" about the life of a clone, after cloning has become possible and people had clones made for transplant purposes. They were spare parts, and as morally repulsive as that sounds, if the technology existed people would not be able to resist the temptation to extend their lives by means of the organs of that clone. It is knowledge, but it is evil. Since we have already eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we need to be aware that the pursuit of knowledge without consideration of where discovery would lead us as the human race could be dangerous.

Individual cf. Jeremiah 17:9

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil speaks to us as individuals as well. We've all heard advice that went along the lines of "trust your gut instincts" or "learn to follow your heart." In many cases that is good advice. Even the reading exercise we did at the beginning of this sermon draws upon the conviction that the Holy Spirit can interact with out intuition. But there's a danger in trusting your heart all the time, in giving it carte blanche in our decision-making process. Jeremiah wrote: (17:9) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; what can know it?" In other words, we are quite capable of lying to ourselves, and just because something seems right doesn't mean that it is right. Consider Scripture and seek the advice and counsel of people you trust as wise when making serious decisions.

Conclusion

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil can give us a lot to ponder, so also with the rest of Scripture. Among other things, it can symbolize the endeavor of humans to be self-autonomous, separate from God. This can have corporate as well as individual applications. Seek the advice of others, and seek the counsel of God.

Title: Jesus Says No To Temptation

Theme: Resisting Satan's temptation.

Object: None needed. The children will play the game "Simon Says."

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11 (The temptation of Christ) and 2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

How many of you know how to play the game "Simon Says?" If Simon says to do something, you do it, but if Simon doesn't say to do it, you don't do it. Are you ready to play?

Let's play.

Simon says, "Raise your hand." (Pause.)

Simon says, "Raise your other hand." (Pause.)

"Okay, put your hands down." (Pause.) Uh-oh! I caught some of you on that one, didn't I? Did Simon say, "Put your hands down." No! Well, let's try again.

Simon says, "Put your hands down." (Pause.)

Simon says, "Flap your elbows." (Pause.)

Simon says, "Clap your hands." (Pause.)

Touch your nose. (Pause.) Oops! I caught some of you again. Let's try one more time.

Simon says, "Touch your nose." (Pause.)

Pull your ear! (Pause.) Good! I didn't trick you that time. You're catching on to the game now.

In the game of Simon Says, we do what Simon says to do, but in real life we should do what the Bible tells us to do. Did you know that the devil will try to trick you into doing what he wants you to do?

The Bible says, "Thou shalt not steal," but if you go to the store to buy something and the cashier gives you too much money back, the devil will try to get you to keep it. He will say, "That isn't stealing," but if we take something that doesn't belong to us, it is stealing, isn't it?

The Bible says, "Love your enemies," but when someone does something to hurt you, the devil will say, "Hurt them back, after all, they hurt you first."

The Bible says, "Thou shalt not lie" but when you accidentally break your mother's vase and she asks if you know how it got broken, the devil will say, "Don't tell the truth. If you tell the truth, it will just get you into more trouble."

The devil even tried to get Jesus to do things that were wrong. Do you know what Jesus did? Jesus answered him with Scripture. That's a good way to defeat

the devil, isn't it? Just read the Bible and do what it tells you to do -- not what the devil tells you to do!

Dear God, help us do what Jesus did. Help us do what the Bible tells us to do instead of listening to what the devil wants us to do. In Jesus' name, amen.