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'How Shocking!!!
(Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7)

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I wonder why it is that people in America love to be shocked! The popularity of slasher & violent movies hasn't diminished. The numbers of viewers of such reality shows as '90 Day Fiancée,' and movies like 'Parasite' and shows and books about serial killers continue. Movies and news accounts of natural disasters alarm us even as we are rooted to our chairs. People still watch tabloid like news shows about kidnappings and gruesome murders for days on end.

I remember that people watched the invasion of Iraq years ago while eating popcorn in their living rooms, sitting in our armchairs while feeling scandalized or upset, but finding it hard to push the OFF button on our remotes. Of course, the media recognizes this fascination we have, and therefore makes each story as sensational as possible. It's like they're saying, "Look at this! How can it be? How can people do things like this? Isn't it horrible?"

And readers and viewers can feel shocked, even if in a comfortable way. They can also feel good about themselves, even virtuous. After all, they are certainly better than the perpetrators of such terror & violence. Surely, those suffering have done something to deserve it. Or someone has. But certainly not US!

Being blamed is so uncomfortable that most of us learn to say at a young age, "I didn't do it, or it wasn't my fault!" If we can prove or at least cast blame on just whose fault it is, then we can feel really good about ourselves. Thank God WE didn't fall into THAT trap! And unfortunately, some of us have, somewhere along the way, absorbed a fear of hell, so that we are browbeaten into acting or at least looking good and virtuous! The reality is that we all sin, but most of us don't want to realize just how we sin. We think sin is breaking rules, but sin is much deeper than that.

In our Hebrew Scripture story today, God created the universe and placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God invited them to eat anything they liked EXCEPT fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God even told them why: "You shall not eat of that tree, for in the day that you eat of it, you will die!"

Why do we see this as a terrible threat? Through the ages, the finger has been mostly pointed at Eve. It was HER fault – and through her, at Adam...who after all, just did as he was told to do!

It was the serpent, the snake, who turns God's words into a threat – even made them out to be a LIE. The serpent says to Eve, "You won't DIE. God knows that when you eat of it, it will open your eyes. You'll be LIKE God, knowing good and evil." The serpent was right, in a way. He didn't out and out lie, he just twisted the truth a bit. Eve and Adam did NOT drop dead right away.

Could it be that neither the serpent or the rest of us have heard God clearly? MAYBE God warned them not to eat of this tree because GOD KNEW that the first thing they'd do after such a warning would be to HEAD STRAIGHT for that tree! Maybe God MEANT to fire up our intelligence, to start up our hunger for knowledge. By saying, "If you eat that fruit, you'll die," maybe God was just pointing out to Adam and Eve the OTHER side of knowledge.

- *The other side of smelting and forging iron is weapons.
- *The other side of splitting the atom is nuclear bombs.
- *The other side of cars is accidents.
- *The other side of movies & TV is more acceptance of horror.
- *The other side of space travels is star wars.
- *The subject of cloning brings up issues of moral danger.
- *The other side of electric light is the electric chair.
- *The other side of firewood & carpentry is the cross.

I'm sure that YOU could add to this list of other sides!

You see?! God was telling the truth. "Don't eat it – you'll die."

So, how did Eve and Adam sin so grievously that they were thrown out of the garden? Maybe the sin was not so much disobeying God, as it was MISREPRESENTING God. In doing that, they insulted God's love and didn't even know they did it!

We humans still do that so often. The serpent made God out to be a bully, and Adam and Eve went along with this to such a degree that they hid from God,

even though they had never known a thing but love, generosity and care from God. But now, they hid from God, because suddenly, they were afraid of God! And fear stains love. We might obey when we're afraid, but we no longer trust. If you're afraid of what might happen if you disobey, your trust is gone. Wasn't it the Apostle Paul who said that perfect love casts out fear?

We also often misrepresent God as some sort of tyrant who is just waiting to punish us for all our terrible sins, and don't realize that this misrepresentation is a greater sin than all the sins WE think are so terrible! God always loves us, no strings attached, but we insult that love by making God out to be something else altogether! That might make us feel more comfortable, especially if we're pointing fingers at other people.

We give lip talk to Jesus' freeing us from aimlessness and sin, but we still, we continue to fear God. Some Christians even try to understand natural disasters as God's punishment for sins – other people's supposed sins.

Yes, we seem to be addicted to violence, shocking behavior, scandal, disaster, punishment and sin. Partly because if the sin is big and clear enough, we can point to other people and feel virtuous; and partly because fear can produce in us a delicious tingle of adrenaline.

Like Adam and Eve, we are made in the image of God. Each of us. All of us. Sure, we fall short in comparison to God. We now have the knowledge of good and EVIL. We have choices to make. Jesus clarified for us how to make those choices in the way of God: "Love God and your neighbor as yourself."

Let's accept ourselves AS WE ARE without comparing ourselves to other people. Let's embrace our God-given intelligence and freedom of choice. Let's be partners with God. Only then will we know eternal life, right here, right now.

And for Christ's sake, may the Force be with us!

Amen.