

## 2023 Talking Snake

“I can’t take the Bible seriously, it has talking snakes in it.”

I won’t lie, I spent a good portion of my sermon prep this week rehashing the arguments. And so I was reading about mitochondrial DNA suggesting we descended from one woman, which is pretty cool. But then the other side says, “No, we evolved from a common ancestor!” And soon you are going down a rabbit hole looking at skulls from who knows how long ago and saying, “Well that looks like a human to me.” And you go much further down that path and, let me tell you, there are some pretty tall weeds you can get lost in with paleoanthropology – and not just as a creationist. “That ‘Lucy’ replication looks so much like us, look at her feet, is she the missing link?” Until you realize that’s based off of 40 bones, and none of which are from her feet. I’m not an expert, my biology bachelors only goes so far, but what I am saying is, it gets wild out there. How can we be certain of anything?

Can we even be certain of the stuff in the Bible about this? We so often here:

“Genesis is clearly poetry.” Except it isn’t. It’s structured, sure, just like creation is, but it’s not textbook Hebrew poetry with repetition with intensity in it. But they continue, “Moses and God would never expect us to believe in a 6 day creation, a literal Adam and Eve, and a talking snake!” Well I’m not so sure. Because Jesus

says “In the beginning he made them male and female.” He seemed to think they were real. He also says, “if you believed Moses you would believe in me.” And Moses wrote the thing. Finally, we know his apostle, Paul, seemed to think they were real as he notes in 1 Tim. 2: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” And we heard his epistle lesson today about Adam bringing death into the world.

And so the testimony of the Bible seems to say, “Ya, it happened.” I think we can be sure about that. But even that certainty doesn’t answer all the questions, “Why, how, where, when?” But that doesn’t mean they aren’t worth pondering.

I think it is perfectly natural for us to ponder our origins. Who are we, where are we going? These are significant questions to who we are. And I would point out the very fact that we ask such questions is probably our first hint that perhaps we are more than overgrown amoebas. If our consciousness is random synapses and random chemicals in the petri dish of the universe, well, can we trust them? And even if so, there certainly isn’t any meaning to our thoughts.

But I think there is. And I bet you do too, or you wouldn’t ask the question, and long for an answer to it. We ponder things eternal. We are more than animals. But how?

Today we are brought into our origin story, as presented in Genesis. About beings of the dust of earth, but made in the image of God and given the breath of life. And we know this, we do! When you see a dead body, you can dress it up all you want, but we all know it doesn't just look like they are sleeping. We know somethings gone. That breath of life. Can we get it back again? Are we more than dust and animals?

I commend that thought to you even as I now acknowledge that our particular reading today in chapter 3 isn't about our origin specifically, no, this particular origin is the origin of evil. God made his creation and after the creation of woman it was perfect, it was "very good." What changed it? Did he make evil and bring it into his creation? No, we brought it in. Or rather, it may be more accurate to say, we decided we didn't need God, pushed him away, and guess what filled the void – evil.

And we can dispense with silly theories that God didn't want us to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because he wanted us dumb. He didn't want us to know evil. And as Adam and Eve lived, up until they ate the fruit, they lived as people who trusted God's Word, who believed in Him. They were a people of faith.

But then comes the devil, the accuser, the liar, and he causes them to doubt God's Word, and to turn from God toward themselves, "We can be like him."

Ah but here we are back again at the talking snake. Isn't that a little crazy? Well, of course this is crazy! I bet Eve thought so too. Granted, she doesn't run screaming from the thing – which she probably should have! - but I think she knew very well that something supernatural was going on. Evidenced by the fact they are talking about God and how "unfair" he is. Because it's not just the fact that the snake talked. It's the fact that they weren't talking about the weather – they were talking about things eternal and divine.

And again, before you lapse into fairy tale land, think of the landscape of modern spirituality, even here in the modern west. Wiji boards, seances? That's right people are talking to wooden boards and spirits. You can buy crystals and gemstones online to grant you protection. People all over our country are sending positive thoughts and vibes your way through the universe. Where's the empirics for that, I wonder? People believe this stuff, but the devil, who for all we know is a high ranking fallen angel - and we know angels can look like men, have wings, or not, or have animal faces – so the devil becomes a serpent, to slither and sneak up and deceive , and suddenly that's too much for us civilized folk?

But I suppose it is fair to ask: Why didn't the devil become a human to tempt eve – that would make it sound less like a fairy tale? Well, firstly, I think the devil is just fine with us thinking it's a fairy tale, so he certainly has no incentive to make it seem more real to our modern ears. Secondly, there weren't many men around were there? There was her husband, and lets not forget, God who walked and talked with them, likely the pre-incarnate Jesus, and I think He is the last person satan wanted Eve thinking of as he tried to tempt her. So even as the devil, even now, uses nature to tempt us, he used something of nature to do the same to her.

We of course know that she fails, as does Adam. We have talked before about how God comes looking for Adam, he's supposed to be the leader, and before we cry "chauvinism!" Let's not miss the point – does he want to be responsible for this? No way. "She can have the leadership, she ate first and tricked me, and God you gave her to me!" But no, his fault will not be shifted, so that Paul condemns who in our epistle reading? Adam. The man who failed. The blame continues, she blames the snake and they receive their curses in turn – the snake cursed to grow on the ground – does that imply it had legs before this? Maybe. Nonetheless, you see something scaly and crawling on it's belly, we now have a reminder of how we will be brought low to the dust someday, when we die for our sin.

But in the midst of complaints, in the midst of curse, we have a new origin. The origin of a promise. A promise that one will come defeat the evil one, and all that

our evil has brought into the world. Many of you know it already, Genesis 3:15 – “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” There will be a conflict between the offspring of woman and the evil one. And there will be wounds on both sides, but we know which will be fatal and eternal – the wound to the head of the evil one.

And so here, immediately after we sin, immediately after we fail to apologize, or beg forgiveness, but instead pass the blame around, here God does not decide to wipe us out. But instead to promise to come and do what we cannot.

And the themes are even more rich. Since we now know evil, and man, is it all it is cracked up to be? Pain heartache, death, shame? Since we have that. God then offers the first sacrifice. Something will die to cover the shame of Adam and Eve. And so animals are killed to offer them clothes.

And where of course do we see the theme of a sacrifice, meet up with the promise of someone to crush the serpents head? You know it as well, at the cross of Jesus. And are we talking fairy tales here, or a real event? This is real. Because sin and evil are real. If they weren't we wouldn't need a cross or a Savior. But they are real, we feel them, we know them, we participate in them! And so Jesus goes to a very real cross, a new tree of good and evil. For he is good and yet our sin, is so

evil and it is there upon that tree. And the fruit of that tree is his blood pouring down to wash us, to cover us. To take away the sting of death and the devil who has led us into so many temptations.

And here is a new origin story for you. Who are you? You are dust, you have the breath of life in you, for a time. It will leave you, someday. And justly so because you are also a sinner. But all of these things we can know already in Genesis 3, and in fact, we don't even need that, we can look around and know these depressing realities. But at the cross we learn something more about you. That you are loved. Someone died for you! That's love. We can know you are forgiven. Because that blood was shed to pay your debt. We can know the evil one will lose. Jesus resisted him, and overcomes him. And, finally, I think we can know, especially with the empty tomb in mind – again not a fairy tale, but real. We can know that the breath of life can come back to dust and cold clay. And the One who has overcome all things has promised that you, will receive that breath of life again.

God be praised. Not because of fairy tales, folks we are really here, we are really more than animals, and we have real promises, rooted in history, of eternal life. May that give us and our ponderings of time and eternity, good and evil, life and death, reasons for hope.