

**Sermon notes**  
**in preparation for delivery at**  
**St. Luke's Episcopal Church,**  
**The First Sunday in Lent, Feb. 26, 2023, Year A.**

**Scripture readings:**

First reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7.

Psalms 32;

Second reading: Romans 5:12-19;

Gospel reading: Matthew 4:1-11.

**Hymns:**

OPENING with the **Great Litany**. *Had we but time and personnel enough, we might have rehearsed singing it responsively. The litany is a very complete prayer with everything like intercession for all aspects of life and society; confession of our own sins and shortcomings; praise; thanksgivings as well. Thus we do neither the prayers of the people nor the confession on a Sunday of the Great Litany since it incorporates all of those in itself.*

Sequence Hymn: 445 in *The Hymnal 1982*, “Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depths be praise”;

Offertory Hymn 448 in *The Hymnal 1982*, “O love, how deep, how broad, how high, how passing thought and fantasy”;

Communion Hymn 178 in *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, “Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from a world of care”;

Closing hymn 142 in *The Hymnal 1982*, “Lord, who throughout these forty days for us didst fast and pray.”

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Memories of my mother surface for me when I read the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. Genesis and we sometimes accord Eve the title “Mother of all things living.” Scientifically that is probably not correct, that a person named Eve inhabiting a paradisiacal spot in the Tigris-Euphrates River valleys in what is today Iraq was the mothering source of all. And yet we long to love and revere a founding mother of all and to sit at her feet and care for her in age and debility. Or perhaps, if she is God, to know she will care for us in age and debility. We know and trust and hope that our mothers conceived and birthed us out of love.

Love that delights in a 5 to 10 lb being who caused his birthing mother the distress the males among us watch and hear in dramas such as “Call the Midwife.” A show I think one of the most loving offered on television or on our smart phones, if they are our receiving medium.

The distress and pain transform to sheer joy and delight in the being the mother delivered from her womb after all those nine months of gestation and care. The infant is handed to its mother in those moments after delivery and her sweaty face moves from tears of pain to sheer joy in this being.

We feel this experience to be God’s sheer joy in you and me and all creatures when as Eucharistic Prayer 3 puts it, creation burst forth from God’s womb. Mothering God. Mothering Eve. What a changed world ours would be today if all that natal and parental love existed for Ukrainian and Russian infants into time into adulthood.

If it filled the hearts of both Republican and Democratic infants so that as adults we saw each other as sources of God’s delight such that our principal motivation is to care for each other and our earth.

Where did we lose that joy in each other? Genesis offers us a story as one way to understand that question. The story asks a question. How is it possible in a paradise garden to lose the holy image of the loving God. There was nothing we could want. All our physical and nutritional needs were met.

Genesis tells us God placed this pair God had birthed in a garden that they were to till and maintain. The satisfaction of work was already part of the the desire of God for us.

Is part of the job of maintaining a garden, a plantation also to understand and foster the creatures and growing things with whom we share the garden? So that our work bears good fruit for all with whom we live.

To understand animals and plants as creatures with their own lives in community with us? Eve was not a robot directed in each act by divine command. I cannot imagine God delighting in a robotic community, even though God was the engineer and mechanic who fashioned and programmed thee robot. Our very birthing from the womb of God implanted as part of our genetic makeup the desire to become wise. Eve felt the call to become wise, and even to help her husband become wise. The call to fill the hole in our beings with the wisdom of knowing God. Often the call pulls us over the edge into wanting to be God ourselves. We lose the sense of the God who is the holiest in the height and is so in the depths of our beings as well.

The story writers assume that there must have been a creature who pulled us over that edge of desiring more power and wisdom. The talking serpent who is part of each of our beings. Where does sin enter in?

Sin is not a robot disobeying its masters instructions or programming. It is when we lose sight of ourselves as creatures, and as fellow creatures. In our times we have amassed such wisdom and learning that we fill the holes in our beings with possessions and things. We exploit the God given resources of our Planet Earth. One of the results is global warming.

Ben Rawlence in his remarkable little book *The Tree Line* describes the consequences of global warming for the Sami people of Finnmark

Province in northern Norway. Whose habitat flows east across the top of Sweden and Finland into Russia. About 80,000 remain of these folk who herded and lived with and by reindeer for at least the last 8,000 years. Art from that long ago shows them in the same activity. One of the ways the reindeer have survived below zero winters is by pawing and hoofing through snow so cold it does not melt and freeze, but remains powdery. They paw and hoof down to the lichen They find nourishment with many phyto chemicals in the lichen growing on the rocks below and saved for them by the snow. Warmer winters have allowed the snow to melt and freeze. No longer is it possible to dig down to the lichen. Or for the particularly nourishing lichen to retain its nourishing and medicinal qualities.

There is tons of detail about interaction with the warming climate and its consequences for the Sami and their 8000 years of reindeer herding. Who caused the warming? I did. You did, We did. Our good ancestors did. With them we are coming to accept responsibility for it, And we are finally, too slowly, working to change this. Is it too late for the 80,000 Sami who remain, for their reindeer herds?

It was not some overt act of theft by one or us but a whole social system that requires redemption to help us with acts of redeeming love for this world God delights in.

Genesis moves on to God ejecting Adam and Eve from the garden. John Milton in Paradise Lost pictured Adam and Eve leaving hand in hand in love.

Is that happening to the Sami? Who do we blame? Or do we all band together to lovingly find a way to help us back into care for one another. We know that the claiming power over others with which the human Jesus is tempted in today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew is not the answer. We are tempted to think it might be. Increasingly we listen to autocrats in Hungary, Belarus, Kazakhstan who claim that by giving these autocrats power, all our troubles will be solved by an

autocratic robot master. The serpent tempts us with that power and with surrender to that power.

So this lent is a time for us to face ourselves and let God strip away what still leads us to claim power to satisfy ourselves at others expense.

We come back to the mothering God who delights in giving us birth. Who delights in our growth, and tells us not to put ourselves down. God's love surrounds us. Remember that when God ejected Eve and Adam from the garden God sat down at the Husqvarna sewing machine and made them protective garments to wear. Garments that surround one with God's love and delight.

Feeling that love and delight gives us the confidence to turn in a new direction this Lent. Together to do so. Our liturgies seek to put us back in touch with that love. We paw and hoof or way down through our selfish concerns and anxieties to the lichen surviving under our distracted minds and hearts. In our gathering for Eucharist we find the nourishing lichen in the liturgy we celebrate and feed other the lichen.

Another Lenten practice is to stop and let go for a period of silence each day

The poster also invites us to begin reading this year's Gospel...we in our lectionary agreements concentrate on one of the three **synoptic gospels** each year and in Year A it is Matthew. Join together this Lent in reading a chapter each day as invited to do by the Lenten poster.

We took another little holy step last Tuesday by donating the offerings of the pancake supper to benefit Turkish and Syrian earthquake victims, people who mostly are not Christian or Jewish but Muslim, recognizing God's love for all. We find ourselves wearing Spirit garments made of God's singer sewing machine and discovering we too can love and do our part in healing the creation birthed from our mothering and fathering God. A blessed Lent to us all.