

Sunday, February 26, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

Bible Study

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 32

First Sunday in Lent: “If You Fall Down”

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes)

In groups of two or three, have participants respond to the question, “What might it look like this Lent to walk closer with Jesus?”

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7. Context. This week’s reading tells the story of the temptation and disobedience of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden. It is not so much an historical account as it is a description of the universal human experience of what seems to be an irresistible urge – to grasp autonomy and shun accountability, even (or especially) to God. The “knowledge of good and evil,” is moral knowledge, knowing what is best and right. The serpent who simply engages the woman in conversation is not described as a devil or Satan, but merely as the craftiest of the wild animals. The woman rehearses and refines the prohibition that God had given the man originally. Their eyes were opened, from a moral point of view, to their shame – symbolized by their nakedness.

Matthew 4:1-11. Context. The temptation of Jesus follows immediately upon his baptism. By making universal dominion the third temptation, Matthew highlights a theme present throughout his entire gospel: the fundamental struggle between the kingdom of God, characterized by humility, vulnerability and mutual love, and the kingdom of this world, characterized by fear, greed, and violence. Jesus rebuts the tempter’s suggestions with words in each case drawn from Deuteronomy. (When the tempter cites Scripture, he cites the Psalms!)

Psalm 32. Context. This week’s psalm is one of a handful of “Penitential Psalms” that treat of the experience of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. Hebrew uses the terms “sin,” “transgression,” and “guilt” or “iniquity” to describe different aspects of the human experience: sin is a general term that suggests “missing the mark,” transgression implies “willful rebellion,” guilt/iniquity refers to the negative effects of disobedience. The effects of sin are both physical and spiritual. The psalmist makes the point that the “happy” (or righteous or upright in heart) are not sinless (an impossible state), but rather forgiven.

Read Genesis 2:15-27, 3:1-7, Matthew 4:1-11 and Psalm 32

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Genesis 2:15-27, 3:1-7, Matthew 4:1-11 Psalm 32 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Some reflection questions –

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

- What do we learn about the nature of people in the passages from Genesis?
- Notice when their eyes were opened (v. 7). It was when both had eaten the fruit. Notice the passage is general about which fruit they ate. How does this story suggest how we attempt to “cover” ourselves from our misgivings and sins in inadequate ways?

Matthew 4:1-11

- As a group, brainstorm other passages in Scripture where “forty days” or “forty years” are mentioned. What might that suggest about the importance of Jesus’ time in the wilderness?
- How does the devil tempt Jesus? [Notice the target is Jesus’ identity. “If you are the Son of God...”]
- How do the Genesis and Matthew passages relate?
- How do you think the last temptation of the devil was truly tempting for Jesus?
- What might we learn about ourselves from each of these passages?
- How might these passages help us to know the direction we are traveling during the season of Lent?
- What might you be called to be or do differently this Lenten season?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Covenant-keeping God. You are faithful even when we are faithless. Help us to run to you and not from you with our fears, questions, and doubts. And when we do, give us the grace to hear your words of affirmation and promise, so that we might respond in gratitude, obedience, and praise. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.