

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17; 3:1-13

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Patched Together

Today marks the day when we once again begin our months-long walk through the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. It's less of a walk, honestly and more of a series of hops and skips and leaps as we reflect on some of the earliest moments in God's long and winding love story with the people of God. This fall we begin with the second chapter of Genesis with a snippet of the second creation story. The first creation narrative is likely the more familiar version. It is the grand and cosmic one with God pressing back the waters and bringing forth light and life from chaos. This morning's story is humbler in some ways, more down-to-earth. Neither account is the work of a court reporter of course; neither account is a firsthand play-by-play. Instead these are narratives shaped by generations of God's people, family stories shared and passed down around campfires under starry night skies. At some point along the way, these stories were inscribed on scrolls with the occasional patch added as different important details were remembered, details that speak to this sacred and peculiar love story between God and God's beloved creation. [Read Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17; 3:1-13]

This creation account begins with a litany of all that is lacking, all that is missing, all that is not there. There are no trees, no plants, because there is no rain and no one to till the soil. So God shapes a human out of the dust and the dirt, breathes God's own breath into this one's lungs, and places the human in the garden to till and tend it. The tale tells us that God wants a garden apparently, and that God needs someone to tend to that garden so God carefully shapes a human for that purpose. Over the course of the rest of chapter two, God recognizes that

something—or someone—is still missing and God creates a partner for the human. The author makes a point of telling us that the two are naked and not ashamed. It seems like an odd detail to include, a strange patch to stitch onto the scroll at this point, but of course the story does not end there.

We quickly head into chapter three, the chapter that has birthed any number of church doctrines and fanciful ideas about women and men and that apple and of course the sneaky snake. Much of what we know—or think we know—about this text is largely due to the poet Milton and to other artists who have imagined and patched more and more patches onto the original text. Eve as it turns out is not a desperate housewife with underhanded intentions. We don't know much about Adam other than he eats the fruit when Eve hands it to him. And that snake—Milton tells us that the snake is Satan in disguise. The author of Genesis does not. The snake—who walks and talks and does not slither just yet—is terribly clever and maybe a bit mischievous. The snake raises interesting questions and makes bold claims. And both humans take the bait and both humans take a bite. And things come unraveled.

Just last week I read about a four-year-old's unfortunate encounter this summer with an ancient jar. According to CNN:

A 4-year-old boy accidentally smashed a Bronze Age jar at an archeological museum in Haifa, Israel.

The ancient artifact, which experts say was at least 3,500 years old, was on display without a glass case near the institution's entrance at the time of the incident.

In a statement emailed to CNN...the Hecht Museum defended its decision to present certain objects without protective glass, adding that its founder Reuben Hecht had emphasized making artifacts accessible to the public.

‘The museum believes there is a special charm in experiencing an archaeological find without any obstructions,’ the statement said, adding that the institution would ‘continue this tradition’ despite the incident.

Speaking to the BBC, the child’s father said his son had ‘pulled the jar slightly’ on a visit to the museum...because he was ‘curious about what was inside.’ The man added that he was shocked to see his son beside the broken artifact and had initially thought, ‘It wasn’t my child that did it.’

The boy’s parents could not be immediately reached by CNN.¹

Am I the only one whose heart races listening to that story? I can imagine myself in every set of shoes in this scene, especially those of the boy and his parents’. Something rare and precious that should still be intact is broken. I’d go into hiding, too.

I remember having long and winding conversations with a friend in high school as we wondered out loud about all the what-ifs in this tale from Genesis. We wondered what life might have looked like if the humans had chosen not to take the bait and take a bite. I still play this what-if game, if not with this story with any number of pieces of my own patched up narrative. I convince myself that things would be different if I had just paid closer attention and not backed into the garage door racing to meet friends in high school or if I had studied harder

¹ Oscar Holland, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/28/style/israel-haifa-museum-boy-breaks-artifact-hnk-intl/index.html>

and gotten better grades or exercised more or eaten more vegetables or had been more gracious or kinder or wiser or braver or...or...or... I am not the time-travel expert that Casey is, but as it turns out, I can spend a significant amount of time replaying the past as if I could change it.

So as I read this story, it is easy for me to get swept back up in that same pattern. Like watching a movie and wishing in my core that Juliet would give Romeo just a few more minutes or that Sirius Black would dodge Bellatrix's curse, I want to press pause and push Eve and Adam not to take the snake's word over God's, to have the sense to ask God for clarification and make a better choice. But maybe I'm missing something; maybe trying to stop them from falling is not really the point of the story.

I don't think the author, or the original hearers of Genesis are swept up in the what-ifs. I think they know full well that this story about God and humanity underscores an essential truth about who we are and who God is. When this scroll was finally patched together, the people of ancient Israel were awash in all sorts of competing narratives about humanity and the divine. Other cultures understood their gods to be greedy and volatile with little to no concern for humans. Humans were understood to be playthings, toys to be tossed about and manipulated purely for their gods' fickle whims. Our ancient ancestors understood that our God, the Lord of all is decidedly and blessedly different. Our God intends good things for the human. Our God seeks out the human and wants to be in relationship with us. Our God relishes creation and is brokenhearted when the humans choose something other than the good way, the better way. Yes, there are real consequences when we run afoul of what God intends, AND God still wants good things for them and for us. There is no undoing all the ways we fall short, all the ways we

come up with to unravel the good life God longs for us to have. There are very real consequences for our stubbornly broken ways. And God is still determined not to place us or the tree or the snake under glass. We break things; we hurt others; and others break and hurt us. God asks the humans, “What have you done?” And that’s not the end of the conversation. God is not Zeus. God does not zap them or scrap them and start over. Instead, God draws them out of hiding and patches together a new story, a new path, asking in effect, “Where will we go from here?”

There’s more to the broken vase story, too:

The museum believes the artifact dates from between 2200 BC and 1500 BC. Predating the reigns of King David and King Solomon, who ruled the kingdom of ancient Israel and Judah in the 10th century BC, it would have been used for storing and transporting liquids like wine or olive oil.

While archaeologists have uncovered similar vessels in the past, most of them were broken or incomplete, according to the museum. The fact the displayed item was discovered intact made it an ‘impressive find,’ the statement added...[AND] the museum’s head Inbal Rivlin invited the boy and his mother, who was also present during the incident, back to the museum for a private tour.

‘The museum is not a mausoleum but a living place, open to families (and) accessible...We are appealing to parents: Don’t be afraid. Things like this happen. We will fix (the jar) and put it back.’²

² Holland

The museum refuses to let the broken jar be the end of the story. Jars break, accidents happen, children of God of all ages and in every age do what we shouldn't and mess up spectacularly in ways that cannot be undone. It is tempting to second guess and point fingers and hide, and yet, as our ancestors in the faith remind us, our failures are not the end of the story. God does not shrug off our flubs or our failures no matter how terrible they may be, and God is not pleased when we shrug either. Our actions have consequences; they always have. We are not God's puppets, nor are we God's playthings. God creates us and seeks us out to be in relationship with God and with one another. God does not put us or creation under glass. God entrusts us with caring for one another and for the whole of creation. And when we run afoul of the good things God intends, when we break things or shrug or hide or point fingers, our God remains blessedly determined to patch us together and weave in a new chapter, as many new chapters as it takes to mend us and restore the world. And by the grace of God, the story, our story is not over.

Thanks be to God. Amen.