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## Lent 1 • Genesis 3:1–21 • March 9, 2014

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## The Search Begins

An initial caution must be sounded about beginning a sermon with Genesis 3. By divine design, Genesis 3 is an inseparable part of a unit (Gn 1–3), and neither Genesis 1–2 nor Genesis 3 should be discussed without the other. Genesis 1–2 provides an almost rhapsodic celebration of the Lord’s creation, punctuated at each stage by the Lord’s hymnic “good,” whether sung gently or exuberantly. That “good” describes every corner and every speck of this world, because it reflects the good in the heart of God. Our hearts to this day quicken instinctively at the spectacular beauty of a sunset or at the enthralling opening of a flower or at the heart-melting goo-gooing of a baby just beginning to explore the joy of sound. To start with Genesis 3 runs the danger of trivializing both 1) the gift of a world crafted by God and given to us as home, and 2) the horrid disjuncture between the world given us as home over against what we have made of that home. Genesis 3, in other words, appends the irrefutable reality that the world gifted us by God has become for us a Genesis 3 world. This is not to deny God’s creation touch, nor to besmirch those echoes of “good” that warm our hearts, nor yet to consign us to a hopeless, joyless life. We need to hold Genesis 1–2 and Genesis 3 together, but in tension, conveying neither a world unrecognizably idealistic nor a world bereft of God’s touch, promise, and presence.

The irony of Genesis 3 is that the quintessential good flowing from the heart of God to every part of the world (Gn 1–2) is turned back against God. The crafty one befuddles Adam and Eve with the unthinkable thought of looking objectively at God, setting aside their trust that God knows what is good and opting for their own choices. That breach of trust, that intrusion of self-driven will is what sets a Genesis 3 world apart from the good of Genesis 1–2.

How is God going to deal with this Genesis 3 world? Understandably, there is judgment, quick and serious, ranging from pain and suffering in life, to difficulties between spouses, to drudging labor, and to inevitable movement toward expulsion from the garden and finally death. God does reach out with an undeserved love; how-

ever, that takes several forms. One is to provide clothing for those good bodies, which makes possible life between genders, subject to lust and leer. Of import also is his promise (v. 15) that his children are not simply released into the clutches of the crafty one, but live in hope of God's intrusive offspring that will crush the machinations of the evil one. Tantalizing also is God's initial word, actually his question, "Where are you?" Given that God surely knew where they were, this question has richer intent. Certainly, God was reinforcing the reality of how his children had distanced themselves from God by trying to hide. Behind that word of rebuke, though, it seems that God's question implies a yearning, an invitation that his children come back to God. What makes this astounding is that this is the first word spoken by God after his creative word, and, as such, sets the theme for all the rest of Scripture, a recital of God's desire to bring his children home. And if they do not come home, God will find ways to come into their world to bring them home, and will send patriarchs and matriarchs, prophets, judges, elders and in the fullness of time, his Son. So this first Sunday of Lent marks the first step toward the supreme gift of God's love for the world, the gift of him who came "to seek and to save that which is lost."

It's almost as if there are layers here that can serve as a ready outline: (1) God's creation, clues and echoes and traces of which we can still see and celebrate; (2) the pervasive invasion of evil into every part of that good world; (3) the dual reality a) of God's judgment on a world that continues to hide itself and b) of God's gifts of grace for life in that broken world and of sending servants and Son to seek and to save the lost, the hidden, and the hiding. We add a section (4) to that outline. God's crucified and risen Son says to his disciples: "as the Father has sent me, so I send you." God's search, begun already in Genesis 1–3, continues through us. He sends us, forgiven and renewed, into our corner of this Genesis 3 world . . . until the end of the age.

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