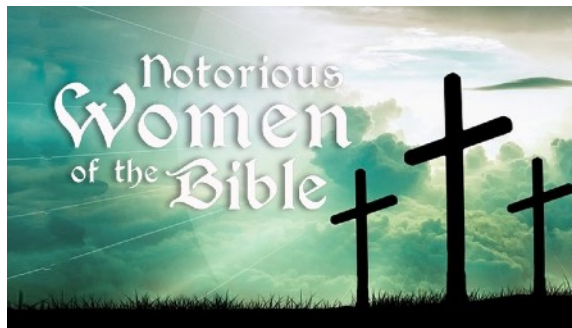


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Second Sunday after Easter Sunday
April 11, 2021
Second Sunday after Easter

"Eve: 'Source of Life'"

First of six in a series entitled "Happy Easter (Thanks to Women)!"

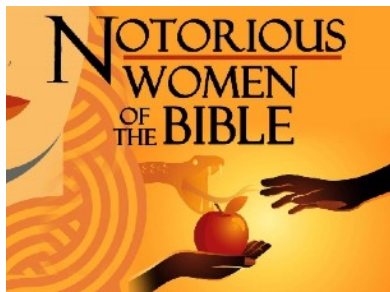
Genesis 3:1-24



The women went away from the tomb and told the disciples that Jesus had risen. One of the reasons why I believe the story of *women* being the first to witness the risen Christ was because any sane gospel writer who wanted to be believed would have 'made-up' a story more acceptable and thus 'believable' story whereby *men* (the disciples) were the first witnesses. "The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that even the witness of *multiple* women was not acceptable 'because of the levity and boldness of their sex' (That's an insult!). Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity, mocked the idea of Mary Magdalene as an

alleged resurrection witness, referring to her as a ‘hysterical female...deluded by... sorcery.’”¹ To write that women were the first witnesses to proclaim Jesus’ resurrection was a scandal, and no one would intentionally set-out to write a scandal. The gospel writers wrote the truth that women were the first witnesses and proclaimers *despite* the fact that it was a scandal.²

Joanna, Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of Jesus, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mary wife of Cleopas, and Salome mother of James and John (half were Marys!): six women first witnessed the resurrection and began to proclaim the gospel...to men. Without women there would be no Easter story.



¹ Justin Taylor, “Who Were the Six Women Who Saw the Risen Christ”, *The Gospel Coalition*, April 10, 2020. Found at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/holy-week-good-friday-april-3-ad-33/>, accessed April 10, 2021.

² The notion that scandal, or that which would actually not suit a believable narrative, is believed to be more credible, in terms of historicity, is a key tenant of veracity according to the Jesus Seminar.

Without women, as we shall see in this series, the early church would not have survived. And today, as we shall learn from the first woman in the Bible, without a woman, we would not have humanity.



For those who are not aware, I have recently been married. So, I am really interested in the story from Genesis chapter three that Daniel read for us. First, I think it is important to point-out that the story is not to be interpreted literally. It is to be interpreted theologically. I am not a Hebrew scholar and I have not read any commentary that specifically informs me that the story of Adam and Eve is, what is of then referred to, in French, as a *pourquoi* story.



Pourquoi means, ‘Why?’ The Genesis story, explains to an ancient, pre-scientific mind why things are the way they are. Mary-ellen Bixby and Daniel Guerra who study and teach literature may often refer to these narratives as ‘etiological texts’ that seek to “explain the origins of some custom or institution, some monument or natural phenomenon”.³ For example, as I read chapter three, the narrative explains, why we have consciences (3:5)⁴, why we feel the need to wear clothes (3:7), why snakes don’t have legs (3:14), why do people fear snakes so much (3:15), why is childbirth so painful and deadly for women (3:16), from where did patriarchy come (3:16), why do men have to work so hard and thus die earlier than women (3:17-18), why do we die (3:19), and why do humans bury their dead (3:19)? Chapter three is packed with *pourquoi* explanations, like a Gatling Gun, explanations are rapidly fired-off. Yet, for moderns such as us, we can’t and should

³ “Eitology (in the Bible)”, *Encyclopedia.com*, found at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/etiology-bible#:~:text=In%20the%20field%20of%20literature,is%20what%20it%20is%20today>, accessed April 10, 2021.

⁴ Why do we have an innate sense of ethics? Read Immanuel Kant!

not take these explanations literally. If we do, we completely miss the theological implications of the text.

We must move beneath the superficial and mine, drill-down, into the substrata of the text. This morning we will, but only with verse twenty which is just awkwardly interjected, almost randomly, in the story:



“Adam named his wife ‘Eve’, because she would become ‘the mother of all the living’”. Eve’s name means “Mother of All Living” or “Source of Life”.⁵ I would like to focus on this verse because it alone refutes the negative accusations and assumptions that have been unfairly leveled at women. No doubt, the Christian male in Georgia internalized and thus harbored damaging and misguided misogynist theology from chapter three when this past month he gunned down innocent women.

⁵ Kostya Stewart, editorial director, “Eve: ‘Mother of All Living’”, in “Women of the Bible”, *Life Magazine*, p. 10.



Several months ago, when preaching, I referred to the ‘Mitochondrial Eve’.

The Mitochondrial Eve “is the matrilineal most recent common ancestor (MRCA) of all living humans. In other words, she is defined as the most recent woman from whom all living humans descend in an unbroken line purely through their mothers and through the mothers of those mothers, back until all lines converge on one woman”.⁶ Thus the text is correct, we all come from an ‘Eve’ who gave birth to our lives.



⁶ “Mitochondrial Eve”, *Wikipedia*, found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitochondrial_Eve, accessed April 14, 2021. Note, this does not mean that all humans emanated from a single female human from Africa. It means that we know of different ‘lines’ and there is an oldest ‘line’. As more discoveries are made, the ‘Mitochondrial Eve’ can move forward or backward in time as new older lines are discovered and old ones become extinct. There was never ONE female from which all human descended. Many women lived alongside the so-called ‘Mitochondrial Eve’.

Perhaps the other theological lessons that I interpret from the story in chapter three is that men and women are equal and that Eve is *not* the cause of what is often referred to as ‘The Fall’.



First, notice in the story a huge blame game is going-on. Adam blames God because God gave Adam the woman. Then God blames the woman. Then the woman blames the serpent. Then God punishes the serpent, then the woman, and then Adam. As all are punished, I really don't see any central blame being placed on Eve as Christian orthodoxy has often done.

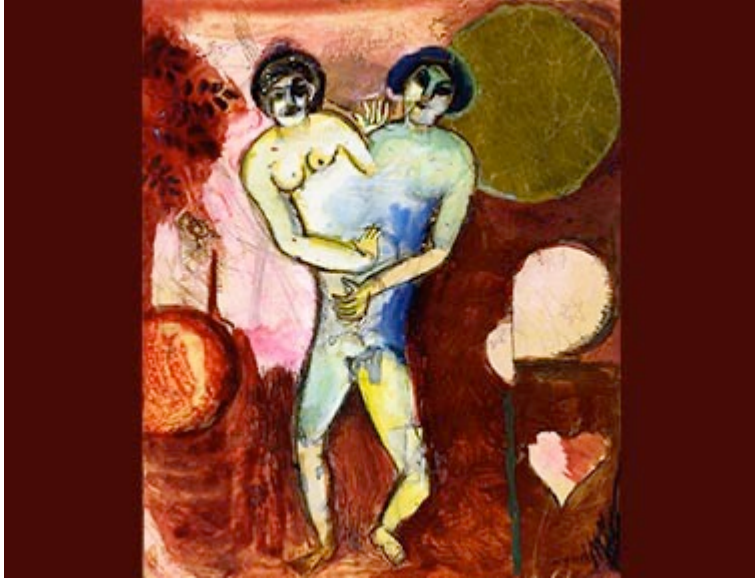
Second, despite Eve being formed from a rib in one story, Eve actually is co-created with Adam in another story.



That's right, there are two Creation stories that have sort of been mashed together, almost incoherently.⁷ In the first story man and woman are created together in the image of God: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). In the second story we have Adam being formed first and then Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-22). Because men have the same number of ribs that women have, I think, theologically speaking, I am going to focus on the first story to interpret that men and women were simultaneously, and thus equally, created by God.

But the story of Eve coming from Adam's rib opens-up a whole other can of worms. In Hebrew, the word "*adam*", 'the human', is gender neutral. In other words, it is not a male's proper name.

⁷ Wait! How many trees are there?

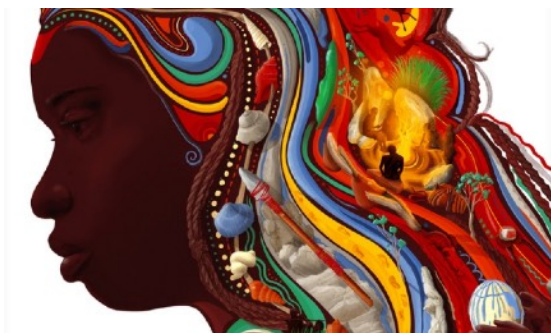


One scholar continues, “This would mean that the ‘humankind’ in chapter one could have been an undifferentiated or androgynous person, with the blessing of male and female in chapter two being a declaration in anticipation of the separation of the sexes. The woman was then brought to the man who said, ‘This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man’ (Genesis 2:23). The Hebrew words used for ‘woman’ and ‘man’ here are *‘ishshah’* and *‘ish’*, respectively. This is the first time that a specifically male reference is made, and it happens at the time of the creation or extraction of woman. (Up to this point, the more generic *‘adam’* was used.) Instead of pointing-out differences, I think the man was actually pointing-out similarities. They were both two of the same kind, and suitable for each other.

Man was identifying woman as ‘of himself’”.⁸ So, perhaps humankind was one, then differentiated on a spectrum (as there is male, female, and intersex and/or hermaphrodite humans), and then...



...coming back to my recent marriage, became “one flesh, no longer two, but one flesh” **again** (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8, and Ephesians 5:31).



⁸ Lee Woofenden, “Do Any Christian Traditions Hold the Belief that Adam Was Androgynous?”, *Christianity*, various dates. Found at: <https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/17105/do-any-christian-traditions-hold-the-belief-that-adam-was-androgynous>, accessed April 10, 2021.

We are all of Eve. Respect her.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the people of God. And the people of God responded, "Amen!"