“Rescue”

Genesis 3

October 2, 2016, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

Over the next six weeks or so we are going to look at six key passages in the Bible, three from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament. Together these six passages capture the basic message of the whole Bible. What is this message? What is the story that begins in the first book in the Bible, Genesis, and only ends in the last book in the Bible, Revelation? Here’s the answer. We need a Savior. We need to be rescued. This is the story the Bible tells. In the coming weeks we are going to talk about how God saves us and how God rescues us, but today we need to deal with why. Why do we need a Savior? Why do we need to be rescued? These are the questions Genesis 3 answers.

Why do we need a Savior? Why do we need to be rescued? Genesis 3 gives us two reasons. One: We have an enemy. Two: The enemy targets the most important and intimate relationships of our lives, which is to say he strikes at our very heart. So let’s look at each of these.

**We have an enemy**. Listen again to Genesis 3:1. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” What does this verse describe? It describes the entrance or the arrival of evil. Right? In his commentary on this passage, Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman asks a simple question. “What prepares the reader for the serpent’s appearance in the chapter?” (Old Testament Essentials, p. 23) When I read that question for the first time I stewed over it and stewed over it. I looked and looked but I couldn’t come up with anything in Genesis 1 or 2 that suggested this was even a possibility. Where did this come from? I couldn’t see it. And then a little further on Tremper wrote this: “Nothing prepares the reader for the first sentence of Genesis 3.” (Old Testament Essentials, p.25)

Can you see it? In the first two chapters of Genesis God created the world and everything in it, and again and again He announced it was good. But Genesis 3 introduces us to something different, something that isn’t good. And nothing in the text prepares us for this. We’re just not ready for it.

And here’s the irony. It’s much the same today. How do we think about evil? We know that evil exists. We know that horrible things happen. We know that there are bad people in this world who do bad things. But how do we typically explain it? Don’t we generally chalk it up to some kind of failure on our part? Something is psychologically or mentally wrong with the person who turned a gun on a bunch of innocent people. Or there is some injustice in society that’s to blame. Or it’s because we don’t have enough laws. In other words, so far as evil is concerned, in most instances we blame some institution or some failing on our part. Something is wrong in our society or in our government or in our laws. And often this is true; but not always, and not at the deepest level says the Bible. We have an enemy.

Now why is this so important? Why is this critical? It’s critical because if we see ourselves, or our institutions, as the source for the evil we see in the world then there is a possibility, no matter how remote or difficult, that we will eventually figure out how to put an end to it some day. If the evil we see in the world can be explained sociologically or institutionally or psychologically or as some breakdown in the family, then there is at least hope that we can fix it. Whether it’s through more laws, or better education, or societal reforms, or a better mental health system or new drugs, or better cooperation between nations, we can fix this, we can make this world right. And you know what, some of it can be fixed this way. But if we believe it’s all on us, and all we need to do is get a little better every day, then we don’t need a savior. And we don’t need to be rescued.

But Genesis, and the Bible as a whole, tell a different story. We do have an enemy, and because we have an enemy, the only way out is a Savior and some kind of rescue is our only hope.

**What does this enemy do?** He exploits our weaknesses and targets our most precious relationships. Notice how quickly everything heads downhill after Adam and Eve give in to the lies of the snake and eat from the tree. First Adam and Eve pull apart from each other. They see that they are naked and feel the need to be clothed. They’ve lost both the peace they felt in their own skin and in their relationship with each other. When God shows up for His afternoon walk, they feel compelled to hide from Him as well. Now that precious relationship has been compromised. When God confronts Adam, Adam’s first instinct is not to own up to his mistake, and not to protect his wife, but to excuse himself by pointing the finger at her. He even tries to blame God for that woman “you gave me.” All Eve can do is blame the snake.

Have you ever done anything like this? Have you ever let yourself off the hook by pointing the finger at someone else? Have you ever given yourself a pass for something even when you knew it was your fault? You knew you shouldn’t say what you said, or send that email or text, but you did it anyway. And when you saw the consequences didn’t apologize, but instead you doubled down. Again, I’m not trying to blame the evil one for everything, but neither will the Bible let us pretend that there is nothing to see here.

Now I want to tell you two stories that I think can help us to appreciate what Genesis 3 is trying to tell us up to this point. First, if you will look in the Narthex today you will discover that there is a hole in the ceiling. The hole is there because we had a leak. Water was coming in. But we couldn’t find it. We looked at the roof above the leak, but we couldn’t see where the water was getting in. This week we cut a hole in the ceiling so that it could be repaired. And suddenly we could see the answer. The leak wasn’t where we thought it was. There is a long metal rib that runs above the ceiling. It looks a little bit like a gutter. Guess what? The water was coming in someplace else and it was running down that metal rib and coming out a little hole. Now that we know this, we can probably find where the leak is coming from. So think about what Genesis is trying to tell us. Is it possible that at least some of the things that are wrong with us and wrong with our world are coming from some place else, are because we have an enemy, and that we will only know what to do about it if we begin to accept this truth?

Here’s the second story. I’ve told this one before. About six months ago I learned that if you go up to a piano and sing or say something, the piano string that matches the tone of your voice will begin to vibrate. The person who told this story suggested that this is how the evil one works. He doesn’t make us bad; he can’t produce bad behavior in us. But he’s had an eternity to observe us and when he sees us leaning in a certain direction that he likes, or contemplating an action that he approves of, somehow he is able to amplify that inclination or that thought and we act on it. Sometimes it’s largely innocent, maybe an impulse purchase or a bag of potato chips. But other times we have to deal with the hurt look on the face of someone we love because we just wounded them deeply. Can we at least consider that something like this might be true?

**And if it is true, then what do we need?** We need a Savior. We need to be rescued. There is a beautiful, beautiful moment at the end of the chapter. Eden is over. Adam and Eve are going to have to go out into a world that is now broken. But before they go the Bible says, “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” (Verse 21) You know what this is? It’s grace. God gives Adam and Eve what they did not deserve or earn, but desperately needed. And what does he clothe them with? Animal skin. Something had to die; something was sacrificed, so God could give them this grace, so they could be clothed. Does this sound at all familiar?

Where does the grace we depend on come from? It comes from the cross. How does God rescue us? How does God save us? By the death and resurrection of Jesus. Today this truth is waiting for us at this table. It’s in the bread and it’s in the cup. This is His body. And this is His blood. Here is the Savior we need. This is how God rescues us. Let’s pray…