

We have some great readings today and each one can keep us occupied for a long time wondering about some incredible things about each one and certainly how they all pair together like a fine wine with some surf and turf. So should we start with the wine, the surf, or the turf? Maybe we should start at the beginning – with Genesis.

Here we have the story of the fall. I love that each figure in the story blames everyone else. And I always like to point out to the misogynists in the room that God told Adam not to eat the fruit but Adam told Eve, so doesn't the one who was told by God directly have the greater responsibility? And she is tempted Satan and he is simply offered the fruit by his wife and he eats it with no problem. All interesting details worth considering. In context of our readings for this day I think it's important to focus on the difference between the immediate and the eternal: the importance of denying immediate gratification for a higher form of joy.

In the course of the story they had been told that an eternity in paradise was there's if they only had faith in God and demonstrated that faith by obeying the commands. Instead, they needed to satisfy their curiosity and take care of a short term desire rather than run the marathon and keep their eyes on the prize. Of course there are many ways to interpret this story for our lives but this is worth considering in context of our readings.

Paul says today in 2 Corinthians: *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.* In different language we have basically the same notion presented in Genesis. We are asked to choose between the temporal and the eternal. Indeed, every day we are asked to make this choice, sometimes in many situations and circumstances. As Christians, this can be a guiding principle in developing our personal and communal ethics. As Christians, we have way of life that considers the eternal sometimes at the expense of the temporal.

Sometimes we are able to choose the higher path and sometimes we are not. It seems to be the human condition. We call the Genesis story the fall and throughout life it can seem like we fall over and over again. And sometimes we can get numb to this and forget that life was meant for the eternal: a phenomenon we see happening in the gospel today.

It is really quite a story and quite a bit is going on. Jesus' family says he's crazy and the religious leaders say he is possessed, which is a good place to begin. Isn't this what people do when we want to discredit one another but have no real basis – no leg to stand on? An equivalent to saying someone is possessed in Jesus' setting might be like calling someone a witch in Salem, Massachusetts. It both discredits them and simultaneously shuns them, thereby making them a citizen with no rights. It makes someone an outcast with no power and no protection. And for one's family to say he has gone mad is to cast them out from your family: to disassociate yourselves from the one. Jesus is being isolated so he can be victimized.

Why? For the scribes, this would help them maintain their authority against someone who was clearly taking it away. They are portrayed as pretenders in Mark's gospel while Jesus is the real thing. For his family, they had to choose their standing in the community or their son: why should they all get shunned and lose everything when they can cast him off and be done with it? After all, that love stuff sounded ok but now I have to change my religion and my way of life...

Where does all of this come from? And what does Jesus have to say about it? Let's start with the family. Even today in most societies, kinship is everything. It is the foundational structure in a society and this can be wonderful in many ways but it can also create problems. An extreme example is how the mafia says family is everything. The world revolves around the family which can be terribly unhealthy for the world. All things should revolve around God. Of course there is love in a family and that is wonderful, but sometimes we use family to protect us from what we fear. We use family to satisfy the temporal forgetting about the eternal. In this way, the family becomes an idol. This seems to be the case in Jesus' society. Simultaneously, Jesus' religious leaders were also focusing on immediate gratification and the temporal rather than having faith and using their faith practice to stay focused on the eternal. How can we survive the Roman occupation using/abusing our authority over the people? Both of these realities are threatened by Jesus, so both parties try to strike back.

It doesn't work because Jesus is focused on the eternal. Their only concern is their own wellbeing. Jesus's only concern is for their wellbeing. To turn things around, he is able to use their own twisted ideas to counter their twisted accusations. How can a divided house stand? Who are my family? Not only does he refute them, but they have inadvertently fallen into his trap, not because it was set for them, but because they are all about the temporal and he is all about the eternal. Which leads us to this very unusual parable about binding the strong man. Who is the strong man? Why the unpleasant image of breaking into someone's house?

You might be surprised to know that Jesus is the one plundering the house who is tying up the strong man. Quite an image for the Prince of Peace. But this is what Jesus has come to do in the gospel of Mark. And this is what he is doing in this story. The structures of his religion, the structures of his society have gone off the rails and formed themselves around personal desire and immediate gratification much like we see in the garden with Adam and Eve. But just like that story, Jesus knows this is not what we were created for. This is not what it means to be a child of God. Since this way of life is winning out, this is the strong man in the house – in God's house. Jesus is taking back the house. Jesus is turning it all over so it can be the way it was before the fall. They want to tell Jesus who he is, but he is telling them who they are.

And who are they? Who are we? Children of God of course. Part of a holy and royal family from before time and forever. He caps the story off with an incredible punchline: all who do the will of my Father in heaven are my mother, and brother, and sister. Leaving us with an incredible message of hope that in God's Kingdom we are never alone and all of humanity is our family. It is a message that says: we may sometimes want the now, but God binds us up in love and offers us something more: limitless life today and forever.