

Genesis 3:7-13; 20-21

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said [whiney], "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said [whiney], "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

Last Sunday and at the one Ash Wed. service we were able to hold this week, Pastor Paul introduced our Lenten theme: "Daring to Dream Again."

On Sunday, he outlined the topics we will cover,

and on Wed. he gave us some tools to help us break free of the barriers...
that keep us from daring to dream again.

Pastor Tim Sledge of Kingsland Baptist Church (Katy, Texas) said that...

one test we can use to determine whether or not we are getting old...
is to ask ourselves this question: "Do I still have dreams?"

We are starting to die when we feel that...

the exciting parts of our lives have already happened.

Do we just get up every morning and try to struggle through the day,
waiting for the weekend or a vacation,
when we can rest up to do it all over again?

Or do we still hold out hope that someday we, and our lives,

can become something more? It is never too late for these kinds of dreams!

This Lenten season, we can all try to become dreamers again.

In the narthex, we have put copies of the "Daring to Dream Again" Prayer:

*"Lord, daring to dream again sounds so good,
but sometimes memories of broken dreams haunt me.*

*Help me let go of the pain that keeps me from responding to your gentle nudging.
Your presence encourages me to set aside fear and to become a spiritual risk-taker.
I want your dreams for me to be my dreams as well."*

One of the barriers that keeps us from reaching...

the future contained in God's dreams for us is pain in our past lives.

In an old *Peanuts* comic strip, Linus is talking to Charlie Brown: "I guess it's wrong, always to be worrying about tomorrow. Maybe we should think only about today."

To which, Charlie Brown replies,

“No, that’s giving up. I’m still hoping that yesterday will get better.”

When we learn to drive,

we are told to be aware of what’s going on in the rear-view mirror,
but driving with one’s eyes locked on what is behind...
is a sure way to crash into what is coming.

For many of us, the past becomes a barrier to our reaching our potential as children of God.

There is childhood pain and adult failure in the past to deal with,
as well as the present guilt and shame that pain and failure often lead to.

The energy these sap from us leaves us little to put toward moving ahead in our lives.

Our accounts are overdrawn, and we have no resources to invest in the future.

Many of us have painful incidents in our childhoods and failures in our adult years...

we think are resolved yet they keep resurfacing, often at the most inopportune times.

Whenever we come to a crossroads in our lives, there they are,
reminding us of all our past failures...

and preventing us from taking chances b/c we fear we might be hurt again.

Maybe even more devastating is the guilt and shame that often accompany pain.

Guilt and shame are not the same thing:

guilt is feeling bad about something you’ve done;

shame is feeling bad about who you are.

We often feel guilty about mistakes we’ve made in the past:

about someone we’ve hurt,

about something terrible we did or something noble we failed to do.

We feel we’ve let someone down, maybe even someone we loved.

Whatever pain we faced in the past was doubled up if we also experienced guilt.

Victims often blame themselves, even if there was nothing they could do at the time.

Abused children always feel they were responsible;

failure always feels like our fault.

When someone sticks a knife in our back, we never pull it out...

until we’ve worked it around a little bit, making the wound deeper by self-blame.

But shame is even more devastating than guilt b/c guilt is at least isolated to one action.

The guilty person says, “I did a bad thing”; the shamed person says, “I am bad.”

It’s one thing to know you’ve made mistakes in the past;

it’s quite another to feel like you are a mistake.

The story of the Garden of Eden has always been thought of as a story about guilt.

Adam & Eve eat the forbidden fruit and feel guilty about what they’ve done.

But as the passage I read makes clear,

what the serpent introduced into the world was shame.

God’s plan was for a world w/o shame or guilt or pain,

but the thirst for God-like knowledge leads Adam & Eve...

to awareness of their nakedness: they have no fur like the animals.

They try to cover up w/ paltry fig leaves,

but God doesn’t wish for them to feel naked and ashamed,

so God gives them animal skins...

so they can go about in the world w/o shame.

If it is not God's will that we travel the world consumed w/ shame, guilt or pain,
how can we break free of the feelings that keep us locked in the past...
and unable to dream new dreams?

First, we have to face our pasts, and the pain, guilt, and shame they carry.

Pain, guilt, and shame are often masked in denial.

We say, "It didn't hurt" or "It didn't hurt that much" or "I've dealt with it"...
or "Others have been hurt more."

All of these keep us from facing that which is holding us back.

Of course, it hurt; otherwise you wouldn't remember it.

Of course, it hurt a lot at the time, and childhood pain is as real as adult pain.

Of course, you've dealt with it, but that doesn't mean you've healed it.

And, of course, others have probably faced worse, but frankly,

that has nothing to do with your pain and your need to free yourself from it.

Once we've faced our painful pasts,

we have to realize that God understands and will use the pain in our life.

We believe in a God who has lost a son: a God who, through Jesus,

has experienced pain, suffering, betrayal, rejection, and even death.

God is not sympathetic to pain; God is empathetic b/c God know how it feels,
and God wants to heal whatever hurt you.

God does not cause pain, but as in the story of Joseph,

who because of his brothers' betrayal was able to save all of Israel,

God can always make good come out of pain.

A beautiful pearl is the result of pain: a grain of sand irritates the oyster,

who surrounds the pain w/ fluids that heal the wound and create the pearl.

What pearls are waiting to be born out of our past pain?

As for guilt, remember that Judas was at the Last Supper.

Jesus took the bread and handed it to the one who would have him tortured/killed...
and said, "This is my body, given for you."

There is nothing you can do that cannot be washed clean in Jesus' blood,
nothing you can do that can separate you from the love of God.

And if you're constantly saying to yourself, "I should've done this/that,"
take the advice of one of my seminary professors:

"You're *shoulding* all over yourself; cut it out!"

As for shame, my nephew, Cody got into trouble one time when he was 4 or 5 years old.

This was unusual b/c he seldom got into trouble.

When I asked him about it, he said, "I'm not a bad boy, but I did a bad thing."

He said this b/c this is how my sister, Susan always reprimanded her kids.

Most of us, I think, were told that we were bad when we messed up,

and I think we carry around the notion that we are bad all our lives.

You know little voice in your head you think of as your conscience?

The voice that tells you you're worthless,
that turns on you when you're most vulnerable,
that accuses you endlessly/mercilessly?

Do you know what "Satan" means in Persian? The accuser.

That accusing voice isn't God's or your conscience. Don't listen to it!

The final step of breaking free from the pain, guilt, and shame that bind us...

is to take steps to move past the hurt and be healed.

How? I would suggest turning to 3 of the 5 tools that Pr. Paul gave us on Wed.:
prayer, journaling, and Bible reading,

and I would also suggest talking to others about your past.

Pr. Paul and I are always available if you want to talk about getting some help.

You have so much to live for, so many dreams to live out, so many lives to touch...

there is no reason to allow the past to hold you down.

Hear the words of your God: "And I will lift you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the...

breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of my hand."

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