

Some Stories are Worth Remembering

A few years back, I met an intern who was working with a conservative group. I suspect a lot of folks would read that and consider this sort of person to be a Bible-thumping troglodyte. Au contraire.

During a conversation about pop culture, we turned to the TV show *Desperate Housewives*. Here, I was thoroughly thrown off by the lack of knowledge about what I would consider very basic imagery used in Western Civilization for thousands of years, something the creators of *Desperate Housewives* clearly still recalled and thought would be a cultural touchstone for potential audiences: the story of Adam and Eve.

Here's an example of *Desperate Housewives* imagery:



That would be Eve with the apple of the Judaic and Christian traditions on the left side. The intern had no idea about the meaning of the imagery. I wonder how many others have forgotten it too?

According to the tradition, Adam and Eve were the first humans created by God. They were placed in the Garden of Eden, a sort of utopia on Earth. Satan, disguised as a serpent, tempted Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God had commanded Adam and Eve to not eat from with the punishment of death. The story is found in chapter 3 of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Here's the moment of temptation:

“But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

As the rest of the story goes, Eve eats the fruit (symbolically, an apple is usually used) and then has her husband, Adam, eat the fruit. Immediately, they realize their nakedness and clothe themselves with fig leaves. God, of course, discovers the original sin and they're both booted from the Garden of Eden to struggle with life and death as we all do:

"To the woman he said,
'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.'

And to Adam he said,
'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
"You shall not eat of it,"
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
In the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.'"

Whether you believe the account or think it's a myth, the story itself and the punishment of man sums up our existence well, which is perhaps why it resonated through the ages. Even today, how many of our political and cultural problems are wrapped up in childbirth, pain and suffering, the need to work constantly, and, of course, death. For some, the story helps make sense of the senseless.

Ironically, it makes a lot of sense that *Desperate Housewives* would use the imagery even though a portion of the audience may not be aware of the meaning: The fruit that gives one knowledge of good and evil, giving in to temptation, trials and suffering as a result, etc.

Much like Greek mythology, stories such as that of Adam and Eve have fundamentally shaped our civilization. It is telling how much we have moved into not only a post-Christian civilization, but have also abandoned the stories that formed the West when even conservative interns are unfamiliar with them.

One wonders what the future holds. Do we rediscover our past or attempt to create new narratives to explain the unexplainable? Only time will tell.