

3-5-17

Adam and Eve Open Pandora's Box Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Story One: Pandora (meaning 'all-giving') was the first woman on earth. Before humans there were the Gods and Titans. The brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus were Titans who had fought on the Gods' side in a war. Zeus, king of the gods, asked Prometheus to create man out of clay and water. Epimetheus had to create the animals and give them their gifts of courage, swiftness etc. He gave out all the gifts and had none left for Man. So Prometheus decides to make man stand upright, like the gods, and give them fire (which Zeus did not want them to have). So Prometheus stole fire from heaven.

In revenge for the robbery Zeus asked another god to make Pandora out of earth and water in order to use her to punish the Titans. Each god and goddess gave Pandora a gift of talent, beauty, charm, music, but also others, like curiosity and persuasion – gifts that could be used for good or ill.

Zeus presents Pandora to Prometheus' brother Epimetheus as a bride. Then Zeus gives Pandora a wedding gift- a beautiful container – Originally it was a jar. It became a box in the 1500s due to a translation error. Anyway, Pandora was given this gift by Zeus with only one instruction, never to open it. Zeus knew that Pandora's curiosity would mean that she could not stop herself, especially when he had told her that she must not do so! Pandora's curiosity gets the best of her and she opens the jar and releases death, illness and many other evils into the world. She tried to close the container, but the whole contents had escaped except for one thing that lay at the bottom "Hope"!

Story Two: Long before the world was created there was an island, floating in the sky, upon which the Sky People lived. They lived happily. No one ever died or were born or experienced sadness. One day one of the Sky Women realized she was going to give birth to twins. She told her husband, who flew into a rage. In the center of the island there was a tree. He tore up this tree, creating a huge hole in the middle of the island. Curiously, the woman peered into the hole. Far below she could see the waters that covered the earth. At that moment her husband pushed her. She fell through the hole, tumbling towards the waters below.

Water animals already existed on the earth, so far below the floating island two birds saw the Sky Woman fall. Just before she reached the waters they caught her on their backs and brought her to the

other animals. Determined to help the woman they dove into the water to get mud from the bottom of the seas. One after another the animals tried and failed. Finally, Little Toad tried and when he reappeared his mouth was full of mud. The animals took it and spread it on the back of Big Turtle. The mud began to grow and grow and grow until it became the size of North America.

Then the woman stepped onto the land. She sprinkled dust into the air and created stars. Then she created the moon and sun. The Sky Woman gave birth to twin sons. She named one Sapling. He grew to be kind and gentle. She named the other Flint and his heart was as cold as his name. They grew quickly and began filling the earth with their creations.

Sapling created what is good. He made animals that are useful to humans. He made rivers that went two ways and into these he put fish without bones. He made plants that people could eat easily. If he was able to do all the work himself there would be no suffering.

Flint destroyed much of Sapling's work and created all that is bad. He made the rivers flow only in one direction. He put bones in fish and thorns on berry bushes. He created winter, but Sapling gave it life so that it could move to give way to Spring.

Eventually Sapling and Flint decided to fight till one conquered the other. Neither was able to win at first, but finally Flint was beaten. Because he was a god Flint could not die, so he was forced to live on Big Turtle's back. Occasionally his anger is felt in the form of a volcano.

And finally a little bit more from the first story: The man and woman heard God walking in the garden and hid themselves in the trees. God called, and said, 'Where are you?' Adam said, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' God 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, 'The woman you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree.' Then the woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' In response God first cursed the serpent saying, "You will crawl on your belly and eat dust all your days. And I will make people hate you so they try to strike your head, and you will bite at their heels.'

God cursed the woman saying: 'I will make childbearing painful, but you will still want your husband, and he will be the boss.' God then cursed the man saying,

'Because you have listened to your wife, and have eaten the fruit even after I said, "Don't eat that tree's fruit", I am going to make the ground hard so you will have to sweat to make it produce food. I

am even going to add some thorns and thistles to the plants to make it harder. And now you are going to die and turn back into the dirt from which I made you.' Then God said, "Because people now know good and evil, they could figure out that the Tree of Life's fruit could make them live forever, so I am going to kick them out of the garden and make sure they can't return."

Are these stories true? It depends what you mean by the word truth. These stories with talking animals and immortals who fight with each other, and humans in a condition of perfection are not historical fact. As such, some would say, "those are myths" meaning they are not true. But is truth limited to historical fact? Listen to how Myths were defined by a 4th century Roman writer: "Myths are things that never happened but always are." Things can be true without being historical. Indeed that is the power of myth, and I want you to remember that most of the movies and TV shows you watch function like myths. They are not facts but they convey deep truths. The 3 myths we heard are not factual accounts of human origins. but they help us understand many truths about being human. how life is full struggles How we, like Oscar Wilde put it, "can resist anything except temptation." But not only do they reveal the struggles, but they give us hope that things can be better - that maybe there will be a place or a time when peace, justice, and love will rule the day. On an individual level and on a world wide level, these myths tell us there is beauty and harmony and innocence built into the world and into us, but they also tell us that if we are too naive, there are those who will trick us and harm us and lead us to actions that may hurt us, sometimes unto death. I have read of the moral and spiritual struggle of Albert Einstein and others who worked on the first Atomic bombs. After they were successful, conquering the how question, they struggled with they why sometimes. And no science could help them, so they looked to stories of truth, ancient myths that warned that knowledge sometimes leads to destruction. Robert Oppenheimer remarked often that his work brought to mind words from the Bhagavad Gita - the most ancient human scripture: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." After the way he used his position as chair of the US Atomic Energy Commission's Advisory Council to lobby for international control of nuclear power to avert nuclear proliferation and an arms race with the Soviet Union. After provoking the ire of many politicians with his outspoken opinions, he suffered the revocation of his security clearance in a much-publicized hearing in 1954, and was effectively stripped of his direct political influence.

Oppenheimer's actions showed us that yes, scientific inquiry and facts can lead us to great discovery and knowledge, but mythic stories can tell us the meaning of life - the why? They help us wrestle with the truth of how we should live, what we should avoid and how cautious we should be about trusting too much. But myths also give us hope. Hope for something better. All three of these stories help us see a place of no suffering, no pain, no injustice, no want. We can taste it, feel it. The stories help us understand that part of the task of living is helping humanity move closer to that place, that situation - even if we never actually get there. The dream, the vision is the starting place of all possibilities. Maybe, just maybe, there is a way to return to Eden... Perhaps after death, maybe in this life. Myths give us truth, but they do not necessarily give us all the details.

Jesus, on the night before his death, gathers with his disciples. Fully aware of what will happen to him, Jesus uses visceral elements of his own impending cruel death to tell them a story of hope. After giving thanks, he takes the unleavened bread and tears it apart, and says this is my body broken for you. Then after supper he takes the cup set aside in the Passover meal for Elijah, always there in case Elijah comes to announce the coming of the Messiah who will transform the world. Jesus takes that cup, gives thanks for it as a symbol of hope, and says, "this is my blood shed for many, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you remember me until I come again to bring the Realm of God, a world of peace and justice where there is no more suffering."

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.' Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' 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.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 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.