

Leaving Eden

Genesis 3:21-24; Colossians 3:12-14; Ephesians 4:2

Last year an interesting movie was released called *500 Days of Summer*. **[slide of DVD cover]** The movie was about a romance between a young man named Tom and a young woman named Summer. Tom and Summer met, began dating, and before long Tom was head over heels in love. In one scene Tom announced to his best friend: “I guess it’s official. I’m in love with Summer. I love her smile. I love her hair. I love her knees. I love the heart-shaped birthmark she has on her neck. I love the way she sometimes licks her lips before she talks. I love the sound of her laugh.” **(If you have projection capability, you can show this clip. See chapter 5, minute 13:33–13:53 and 13:57–14:13).** Tom was in love. But those feelings of infatuation didn’t last long. A few months later Tom felt differently about Summer. He said: “I hate Summer. I hate her crooked teeth. I hate her 1960’s haircut. I hate her knobby knees. I hate her cockroach-shaped splotch on her neck. I hate the way she smacks her lips before she talks, and I hate the way she sounds when she laughs.” **(If you want to show this clip, see chapter 17, minute 57:35–57:59. Note: when available, we always show subtitles.)**

Those scenes are funny because they are so true to life. We fall in love with someone, and in our infatuation we love everything about them. But it doesn’t take long for that to wear off. No couple can live in bliss forever. If you expect that, you are in for a big disappointment. As minister and author Peter Marty once said, **[slide: wedding scene in background with this quote: “If in starting a family your expectation is that you will enjoy unceasing harmony . . . and a constant romance of support and togetherness—look out! Your fall will be great.” (Peter Marty)]** (Peter Marty, “The Poetry of Sheep,” *The Christian Century* [September 9, 2008], 10.)

All of which brings me to our Old Testament reading from Genesis 3. Almost all of you know the story. Adam and Eve are in the garden of Eden. Everything is perfect. They are in love and living in bliss. But then everything changes. The serpent seduces Eve into eating the forbidden fruit of the garden. She convinces Adam to do the same. God confronts them with their sin. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. Everything changes. Harmony and bliss and perfection are gone. Then God banishes Adam and Eve from the garden. After leaving

Eden, Adam and Eve make a life for themselves. They have a child named Cain. Then they have another son named Able. They work the land. They raise a family. Life is a mixture of good and bad, laughter and tears, joys and struggles. Then tragedy strikes. Their son Cain murders his brother Able. They are devastated. But life goes on. Through the years Adam and Eve made mistakes together and failed each other many times. But they also loved each other and supported each other over a lifetime. They lived out their days like every other couple, with good times and bad times, laughter and tears, joys and sorrows, until they died.

A similar story happens in every marriage. It begins with romance and love and bliss. Marriage begins in a garden of Eden with everything perfect and wonderful. But before long, every couple has to leave Eden. Before long the honeymoon is over. Before long every couple has to live a real life with ups and downs and conflicts and trials and struggles. Eventually, every couple, like the first couple, has to leave Eden.

Which raises an important question. After leaving Eden, how can marriages navigate all the trials and tribulations of married life? How can marriages survive the inevitable onslaughts of disappointments, failures, conflicts, boredom, and struggles? That question brings us to today's New Testament readings from Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4.

As a pastor, I do a lot of weddings. During the wedding there is a spot for one or more Scripture readings. Most couples want 1 Corinthians 13 read, the love chapter, which is certainly appropriate. But a few weeks ago I did a wedding, and for the Scripture reading, the couple chose Colossians 3. This passage is not specifically about marriage, but it's certainly relevant to marriage. The text says, *[slide (wedding scene photo in background): "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love." (Col. 3:12-14 NIV)]*

Ephesians 4:2 is similar. It says, *[add to slide: "Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." (NLT)]* These two passages may be the best marriage advice in the entire Bible. To have a successful marriage requires all kinds of kindness, humility, patience, bearing with other, forgiving each other, and making allowances for one another's flaws. After you leave Eden, those traits will allow you to make it in the real world of marriage. *[end slide]*

Several months ago I read a book by a Jewish rabbi. In the book he tells about his sixteen-year-old daughter's first love. She was hopelessly in love, but it didn't take long for her and her boyfriend to leave Eden. They had some fights, as all couples do. Then they got bored with each other, and eventually they broke up. She asked her dad, "Do you and Mommy ever get bored with each other? Do you ever think about leaving each other?" He decided to be honest with his daughter. He said, "Yes, sometimes. But I'm pretty sure we're lifers." (*Irwin Kula with Linda Lowenthal, Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life* [New York: Hyperion, 2006], 134.) This rabbi understands that every couple has to leave Eden. So if we want to be lifers, we're going to have to follow the guidelines in today's Scripture passages and practice patience, forgiveness, forbearing, and tolerance. If we are going to be lifers, we're going to have to live out our wedding vows, "For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do we part."

We saw an example of that kind of marriage a couple of months ago at the Masters Golf Tournament in Augusta, Georgia. The big story was supposed to be about Tiger Woods coming back to the game after his marriage meltdown. But the story ended up being about Phil Mickelson, who won the tournament. **[slide: photo of Mickelson from the Masters tournament]** Phil, in case you don't know, is the guy, unlike Tiger Woods, who stayed true to his wife. He's missed a lot of tournaments this past year flying his wife Amy back and forth to a breast cancer specialist in Houston. Phil and Amy left Eden many years ago, especially during this battle with cancer. They know all about being faithful to each other "for better or worse, in sickness and in health." Because of her illness, Amy has not been able to make any of Phil's golf tournaments for almost a year. But she came to the Masters, along with their three children. She wasn't feeling well enough to come to the golf course, but just having her nearby was enough for Phil. It gave him peace and joy that he's not had this year during his golf tournaments. His golf game has been weak this season, but somehow having his wife and kids with him at the Masters made all the difference in his performance.

And then, on Sunday of the Masters, Amy surprised him. In spite of her weakness, Amy showed up at the eighteenth hole of the golf course to watch Phil play and cheer him on to victory. When he saw her, Phil practically fell into her outstretched arms. **[slide: photo of them on the 18th hole hugging, or if available, a brief video of this scene on U-Tube]** He hugged her and cried. She hugged him and cried. His caddy also cried, along with everyone

else who saw the scene. Later, Phil's caddy, who everybody calls "Bones" and who's been with Mickelson for nineteen years, said, **[slide: if we show a video, then put a still photo of Phil and Amy hugging]** "This is about a guy who loves his wife. This is about a guy who had a really hard year. Twenty years from now nothing will compare with this. This is his greatest win by far."

Phil and Amy Mickelson know all about leaving Eden and making a good life together anyway. They know all about being patient and tolerant and bearing all things. Like that Jewish rabbi I told you about a moment ago, Phil and Amy are lifers. And that's what God wants for every couple. When we fail, God's grace is available. But God's great hope and dream for us is that we will be lifers. The only way to do that is to follow the guidance of our NT Scripture readings today. Let's look at them one more time. Please read with me: **[slide: (marriage scene in background) "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love." (Col. 3:12-14 NIV) "Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love." (Eph. 4:2 NLT)]**

By the way, many couples need help in living this out, so in today's bulletin we've included a good book on marriage (*The Seven Principles for Making Marriages Work* by John Gottman), along with contact information for both a local and an out-of-town marriage counselor.

One of the greatest writers in American history was Mark Twain. Many years ago, after his wife died, Twain wrote a book called *Eve's Diary*. The book is a first-person account of Eve's life from creation to her burial by Adam. It tells the story of Eve and her husband Adam in the garden of Eden and how they were banished. Then it tells of their long life together, which included conflicts, heartbreaks, and disappointments but also included love, support, and joy. It tells of two lifers who spent a life together beyond Eden. The book ends with Eve's funeral. After a lifetime together, Adam stands at Eve's graveside and says, "Wherever Eve was, there was Eden."

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