## The story of sin

## ommunity rallies to honor Martin Luther King Jr.Presentation

There is a statue of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. that stands in a park in Kalamazoo. It might be my favorite statue of him. It shows Dr King striding purposefully. He is wearing an academic gown, but it’s a gown with a difference: it is engraved with people and the faces of people dear to Dr King and those for whom and with whom he worked for justice. The face of his wife, Coretta, is on his right shoulder, resting, content, on his strength. His visage is firm, his eyes firmly fixed ahead on the prize.

In one sense, this statue is not a good representation of Dr King. It exaggerates his height. It is all of one color. It presents him as a flawless man. And Dr King never wore an academic robe engraved with people and the faces of people. But it is a wonderful presentation of Dr King’s life and legacy; it presents his story and tells his truth as well as one statue can ever do.

We are well aware of this, I think: there is one kind of truth in a mathematical statement, and another kind of truth in a story. We have our limits and our abilities, and different ways we understand the world; we can judge the truth of a statement or a story in the ways they hide or reveal the world to us.

In our scripture readings this morning, we have two foundational stories to our faith; stories that tell us fundamental things about the human condition. The first story is the story of the fall. The second story is the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

## The fall

God provides a place for our first parents to live. It is a land of pure delight, where God provides the good work of farming and harvesting. Because it is nearing Spring here, let’s imagine it is a Michigan maple sugar bush. God says, “Look around, you can use the sap from any tree you wish, except for this one tree: it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you tap that tree, you will die.” And as they look around, they understand they have more trees than they could ever tap; it will be easy and pleasant work to tap as many trees as they need. And so, this is not a burden.

But into the sugar bush comes a—well, maybe it was a snake, but if we keep the story in Michigan, let’s make it a mosquito. And the mosquito was the craftiest of all the creatures of the forest (second only to the black fly). And the mosquito buzzed into our first mother’s ear: “Did God really tell you that your couldn’t tap any of the trees?” But our first mother replied, “No, God said we could tap any tree, except that tree over there; if we do that, we’ll die.” And the mosquito droned, “I don’t think that’s true. In fact, tap that tree, and look at the sap. If you drink the sap from that tree, you will be gods yourselves, you will become wise, knowing good and knowing evil.” And the mosquito handed Mother a spile and a pail.

Mother put the spile into the tree, and the sap poured into the pail. It was so delightfully clear; it caught the light; its odor was sweet; it would make good syrup. And it would make her wise. So, she took a ladle and dunked it into the pail, raised it to her lips, and drank. It was even more delightful than she imagined. She called our first father over, “Drink this! It is wonderful!”

“But, Mother,” he replied, “this is from the tree forbidden to us by God.”

“Do not worry, Father. It will make us as wise as God.” And Father took the ladle: the sap was so delightfully clear, and smelled so good, and he wanted to be wise, and so he, too, drank.

And they were a little wiser, in a way: they knew what it was like to be ashamed. God, who knows all, knows what human shame could feel like; they now experienced this shame. And then they knew another thing: what it is like to work, not out of the delight of working in itself, but out of an oppressive sense of urgency to hide their shame. The tempter did not lie: they were a little wiser; but it was a very bad bargain, the downside we all feel to this day.

However the story works, we are all “fallen” and in need of repair.

## The temptation of Jesus

The second story I will not reset, because I believe that it, or something very much it, really happened.

Instead of one temptation, as in the story of the Fall, we have three temptations. First, Jesus is tempted to turn stone into bread. Remember, he has been fasting for forty days. We probably all know what it is like to be without food for just a little while, and how cranky and susceptible it makes us. And forty days’ fasting is not unknown: but imagine how hungry you would be. Wouldn’t you want to overcome your hunger if you could? But Jesus declares he’d rather live according to his true nature (after all, he was the Word), which was not a wonder-worker or magician, but a teacher and healer. The Spirit drove him into the wilderness; and he would not work against the Spirit.

The second temptation was to show himself the chosen One of God by casting himself from the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, to calm any stirring doubts he had about his own role, and to declare himself to all those present at the center of religious power. But he knows this would only be a false kind of test: again, the Spirit had driven him into the wilderness—into solitude, and away from power, not to the center of power.

The third temptation was to receive all the riches and power that the ruler of this age could provide, if Jesus would only worship him. I think this was the easiest of the temptations for Jesus to shake off, and I think it was an act of desperation on the part of the tempter. Jesus knew full well that he was to worship God alone. Jesus gathers up his strength and tells the tempter to remove himself. Jesus, unlike our first Mother and Father, has passed the test.

## Good things at the wrong time

One thing that is interesting… these are basically all good things:

1. food
2. telling the truth about one’s self
3. receiving the honor due

But the timing was wrong, or the desire was unnecessary.

## Paul’s argument

Romans 5:17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.