

In high school, I wasn't very popular, and I wasn't particularly good with the ladies. I was the nerdy kid who let popular girls copy my homework. Now, to say I wasn't very popular didn't mean I had no friends. In fact, I had a really good group of friends in high school. Friends who liked me a whole lot more than I liked myself. And we had this spot right in front of our lockers where we'd all hang out before school.

One morning we were all sitting there, laughing and joking like we always did, when one of the popular girls came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder. I'd known her since elementary, and we were in biology together, but we didn't run in the same circles. She said, "Hey JR., do you have that biology homework?"

Like a chump, I dug into my bag and snatched out the homework, gave it to her. She flashed her cheerleader smile at me and said, "Thanks buddy!", then walked off.

My circle of friends had fallen silent as they watched the exchange. And I didn't make eye-contact as I turned back to my actual buddies. I felt ashamed, ashamed that I'd allowed myself to be used, to be reduced to "Homework Kid".

Isn't that an experience most of us have had - where someone reduces us to a function, a role? They don't particularly care about our whole Self; they're only interested in what they can get out of us, what we can do for them? [let's maybe introduce the 'reducing' image this early?]

But at least for me, what's worse is that I do the exact same thing to other people. I walk through life mainly concerned with my business, what I want to accomplish, my goals. And I have a tendency to treat other people as means to my ends. Whether that's the person changing my oil or getting me coffee or driving slowly in front of me, it's easy for me to treat other people like their most important job is making my day go more smoothly.

And it's not just people I don't know. When I'm not very careful, that's how I default to thinking about my coworkers, my family, too. What matters most are my goals, my agenda. Everyone else should be in the business of working my plan. [maybe somehow "Me" in the middle of something?]

So when I remember that experience from High School, when I was just Homework Kid, and then I think about how I reduce even people in my life I love to some role, I feel that same shame.

Because I know I'm more than just Homework Kid. And I know the people I'm fortunate to have in my life are more than just Coffee Maker or Cleaner or Food Cooker or Dish Washer or whatever.

I know I'm more than that. I know I'm better than that. And I know you are too. We all are. So why do we do this? Why do we get so selfish?

Genesis 3 tells us this is a *direct* consequence of Sin. Last week, we began this series by looking at the Personal effects of Sin. We saw that when we choose our way instead of God's, our Order, our Logic instead of what God offers us, we experience the death of our relationship with God. That connection between us and the Source of Life is severed.

But that's not the only consequence of Sin. Sin destroys our relationships with other people as well. At the end of Genesis 3, God tells the man and woman what their punishments will be. And then,

once that's all done, the man does something *very* interesting. Something we usually miss. Take a look, beginning in v16:

God said to the woman, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you." And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

Then the man-- Adam-- named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live." -
- Genesis 3:16-20 (NLT)

Ask someone who the first two people were, they'll probably tell you Adam and Eve. But we overlook something *very* important right here in Chapter 3. It's found in verse 20: Adam doesn't name his wife Eve until *after* the Fall. Until after they've sinned, gotten caught and been punished.

Isn't that strange? It makes you wonder... did she have a name before that? And the answer is (spoiler!) Yes, she did. Which raises a fascinating question that has all sorts of implications for us:

Why did Adam change her name? And why right now? Why was the very first thing Adam did after God punished them to change his wife's name? Surely he had better things to do than say... You know, now that I think about it, you look more like an Eve.

It's interesting because naming things is part of God's creative process, and it's a part God shared with Adam. In chapter 1, God separates dark and light, but then God *calls* the light day and the darkness night. And so on and so on in Genesis 1. God orders by making boundaries and assigning names. In the ancient world, names were really important.

We understand that to some degree - how much do parents fret over the name to give your children? You look up meanings and consider others who have those names. Because we understand on some level that a name is more than just a label. Names have power.

It's sort of weird to us today because our names are based on older languages and the meanings aren't clear to us. But in the Biblical world, names were just Hebrew words for other things. So Abraham literally means "father of many". Isaac means "he laughs". Jacob means "tricky". Jesus means "he saves".

It's hard for us to imagine calling up a friend and saying "What up Tricky? Hey, Chuckles and I are going to go grab a pizza. You wanna meat up? Bring Big Daddy."

Okay, maybe that's not so hard to imagine. But that's how names worked in the Biblical world. So we can learn a lot by paying attention to names.

And in Genesis 2, God invites Adam into that same kind of naming power. God decides Adam needs a partner, an ally. So God creates all the animals and has Adam *name* them. It's like God is telling Adam: Let me know when you find your ally, the thing that's like you.

I'm a man. And you're a dog.

I'm a man. And you're an elephant.

I'm a man. And you're a wooly worm.

I'm a man. And you're a cougar.

And on and on and on. And Adam doesn't find anyone like him. No suitable partner. So then God creates something totally new. And he brings this creation to Adam to be named. And what does he name this new creation? Take a look:

"At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" -- Genesis 2:23 (NLT)

Adam *calls* her Woman. He names her. It's the same thing God did in Genesis 1 and the same the Adam is going to do again in Genesis 3. But here, now, she is named Woman. Why? Because she was taken from Man. Man. WOman. The Hebrew words have the same relationship as our English - *ish* and *ishi*. Man. WOman.

After an endless parade of "Not like me. Horse.; Not like me. Kimodo Dragon.; Not like me. Anteater." (you can tell he was running out of creativity), Adam says, At last! This is bone from my bone! This is flesh from my flesh! This is like me! We are the same! *This* is my partner, my ally! If I'm man, then she's WOman!

Woman. A name that speaks of sameness. Of equality. Of shared everything.

But in Genesis 3,

Then the man-- Adam-- *named* his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live." - Genesis 3:20 (NLT)

After the Fall, did Adam changed his wife's name from Woman (like me) to Eve, which means "life". In fact, Genesis 3 tells us that Adam names her that specifically because "she would be the mother of all who live." [*maybe a split-screen with the First Things First color scheme on one side and the Venom scheme on the other?*]

Why? Why is that *first* thing he does? Why is "Life" so important?

Because Adam has just lost Life. When he and the woman chose to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, when they chose to try to make their own Way instead of following God's, they lost the Tree of Life. More specifically, they lost eternal life.

Adam knew he was going to die one day. Maybe tomorrow, maybe in a thousand years. But Death was now a reality for him. And that scared him no less than it scares any of us. The #1 priority in his life had just become escaping Death.

How? Not by going to Heaven. The ancient world didn't have a strong concept of Heaven. They didn't really think about what came after death. Instead, the way a person lived forever was through children. That's why it was so important to have sons who could carry on your name.

In a world consumed by Death, children were the source of eternal life.

Something happened in Adam once Death was a reality for him. His world narrowed in scope. Suddenly, he couldn't afford to be generous, to be loving and selfless. Because now his Self was limited. It would end one day. He couldn't afford to give too much of it away.

Adam knew he would die. That scared him, and he *needed* children. He needed a way to go on, to ensure he wouldn't be erased from history.

And the Woman could provide that for him. So he turned his narrowed vision on her. Suddenly, she was no longer "Same as Me". Now she's "What She Can Do For Me". God warned that this would happen, just a few verses earlier:

God said to the woman, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you." -- Genesis 3:16 (NLT)

Do you see what Sin does to us? Sin destroys our relationships. Not just with God but with each other. Because Sin turns us inward instead of outward. Sin teaches us to ask, What's in this for me?, not We're in this together!

In the wake of his Sin, Adam couldn't see Woman anymore. Now he could only see what Woman could do for him - give him children, ensure he lived on in some way.

What a tragedy! Sin distorts the good thing God intended for the Man and Woman. It's not that being a mother is a bad thing! In Genesis 1, God told them to "be fruitful and multiply"! God intended children to be a beautiful part of the Man and Woman's life together in the Garden.

But now, in the wake of Sin, *all* Adam can see is what Eve can do for him. He can't see her whole person. Now, their relationship is only about what *she* can do for him.

In his eyes, she's gone from Same, to Baby-maker. From us to me. [*illustrate all this with the split-screen*]

We could call this a scarcity of relationship. Like Adam, we tend to think resources are limited - time, energy, affections. So we fight and claw to get ours. We want to be sure that, at the end of the day, we got more than we gave.

This might be why we don't waste a smile and a kind word at Starbucks. Why we rage on the road when someone pulls out in front of us.

But we see that in our closest relationships too. How many of us eyeball the chorelist at the house while calculating who's contributed more lately? And how is it that we can always justify why the other person needs to do more?

How many fights does this cause among us? How often do our "discussions" devolve into arguments over who's giving more? "I took out the trash twice last week. When was the last time you did the dishes? I work all day, then you expect me to come home and do *that* too? Oh, I'm supposed to do all that *and* take the kids to practice? What are *you* doing?"

And we could say the same about office politics or friendships or any relationship.

Sin narrows our focus. Relationships become about me, not about we. We treat life like a solo sport, rather than a team.

But that's not how we were supposed to be. Relationships that are all about me are *not* life-giving. And that's true whichever side you're on. Whether you're the popular girl using the nerd for homework *or* the nerdy kid with a low enough self-esteem to let yourself be reduced to a role and taken advantage of.

I've been on both sides of that coin. So have you. You know that there's no life to be found there.

Using someone else only for what they can do for you leaves you stunted and shallow. Allowing someone else to use you leaves you hollow and empty.

And you're better than that. I'm better than that. We are better than that.

James 4 is instructive for us. James is writing to a fractured, fighting church community. And he says to them,

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?

James says that Sin is our problem. What causes broken relationships is our choice to follow our own Way, to reject God's Way. All we're concerned about is making ourselves happy. So what's the antidote?

But God gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but favors the humble." So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts... Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy.

Facing how we've used other people can and should be painful. We ought to mourn when we realize that we've reduced someone made in God's image to a thing that fulfills a need in me.

The Good News is that God gives us grace. James says that God actually works in us to redeem us from this. We must humble ourselves. Confess our sin, our selfishness, our desire for our own way and repent of it. Turn back to God, embrace God's way. Admit how broken our Way has left us and our relationships. James encourages us:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor." -- James 4:1-10 (NLT)

God will restore and heal us. God is faithful to give us what we need, not what we think we want. God is faithful to heal our relationships, to restore not just our relationship with him, but to heal our relationships with each other.

When we live in Sin, our relationships become self-focused. Characterized by quarreling and strife. But when we follow the Way of God, we learn what it means to be more concerned about what we give than what we get.

Getting isn't bad in and of itself. As we saw in Genesis 2, we weren't created to be self-sufficient. We were created to need each other. But our relationships are meant to be characterized by mutuality, not exploitation. We must not reduce someone else to only what they can do for Me.

God calls us to see the whole person, not just what they can do for us. God's way is We, not Me. God's way is Give and Get, not just Get.

What relationships in your life are you guilty of reducing to this? Where have you either reduced someone to a function or let someone reduce you to a function?

Are you guilty of reducing someone in your life to Housekeeper? Bread-winner? Barista? Booty-call? Crazy Ex? Teacher? Boss? Employee?

You are better than that. God has a better way for you. Better relationships. Stronger, more vibrant, more life-giving. Repent of your reductions. Know that God is working in you even now to be better.

That nerdy homework kid might actually be a pretty cool guy.

Communion SetUp

Each week during Lent, we respond to the message through the Communion meal because it represents Jesus' death for our Sin. We eat it to remember that Jesus died for us, to remember what our Sin actually costs: death. Not just our own death, but relational death as well.

When we eat the wafers, we remember that Jesus' body was broken under the weight of our sin.

But the Communion meal is also a reminder that God did not leave us in our sin. God rescues us. So when we dip the wafer in the grape juice, we remember that Jesus' blood was poured out to restore us to God, that his death removed the barrier we'd set up between us and God.

You don't have to be a member here at Beavercreek Nazarene to receive the communion meal. This table belongs to Jesus, and the only barrier is your own unwillingness to repent. So if you are willing to turn away from your selfishness, to abandon your own way and choose to follow God's way, then you are welcomed at Jesus' table.

Even though our sin has made our relationships self-centered, God shows us how to give everything by dying for us. So before you come, consider a relationship where you've reduced someone. Where you try to get more than you give.

Humble yourself. Confess that sin and repent of it. Then come to God's table in humility and gratitude that God has given everything for you.

Eat Jesus' meal as a commitment to imitate him.

Benediction

Choose a Relationship this week. Go give more than you get.