

Genesis 3 is a story about smart people doing really dumb things. The October issue of *Reader's Digest* has a few examples of this from the game show *Jeopardy!* As you recall, the show supplies the *answer* and the contestant gives the *question*. ANSWER: By the 4th century AD, Rome had 28 public ones stacked with rolls of papyrus. CONTESTANT: What are public toilets? CORRECT RESPONSE: What are libraries? ANSWER: A Christian hymn and a Jewish holiday hymn are both titled this, also the name of a 2009 Tony-nominated musical. CONTESTANT: What is Kinky Boots? CORRECT RESPONSE: What is Rock of Ages?

Now, remember that Genesis 3 is smart people doing really dumb things...and they get dumber as the story goes on. Yet there is one message from our Scripture today that has a truly redeeming quality. Verse 8 says, “*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...*” That verse indicates that for Adam and Eve heaven had come to earth. That was good news and not so good news for them.

Tremper Longman says: When Genesis was written, the world was already broken by sin...The world quite simply was not a nice place [nor is it now, to be truthful]. The creation account tells us that even though no one can escape the brokenness of world, God did not create it that way. Genesis 3 provides the account of how the world came to be the evil place that it is. The story begins with the abrupt appearance of the serpent. Questions immediately come to mind, questions that we cannot answer with complete assurance. Where did the serpent come from? How did the serpent turn evil? Who is the serpent?

The New Testament identifies the serpent with Satan in Romans 16:20 and Revelation 12:9, and that does make sense in the light of what we later learn about Satan...The serpent represents one who is intent on undermining the authority of [the Creator], and the serpent is not lacking ability, being described as “shrewd” (a word associated with wisdom and used in a positive sense in the book of Proverbs).

God had warned the first two humans: “*When you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will certainly die*” (Gen 2:17). Though Adam and Eve do not immediately drop dead, their ejection from the Garden of Eden means separation from the tree of life. It's now just a matter of time until they return to the dust from which they came. However, the effects of the fall go well beyond physical death.

The first place the consequences of the fall can be seen is in relationship, which is so important to human beings. No longer can Adam and Eve stand naked before one another and feel no shame. They cover themselves with fig leaves. Their shame extends beyond a feeling of physical inadequacy and includes a psychological and spiritual estrangement. They no longer experience the same measure of intimate connectedness that they felt before the sin.

But this is not the worst of it. This separation of Adam from Eve (and vice versa) derives from a more fundamental disconnection with God. Up to now Adam and Eve have had easy access to and communion with God. After Adam and Eve “*heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid*” (Genesis 3:8). Their removal from Eden implies that they no longer can easily be in the presence of God. (Longman III, Tremper. *How to Read Genesis* (How to Read Series) (p. 112f.). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.)

Now, imagine a starlit night. In the distant horizon, you see the farthest object that one can see with the naked eye: the Andromeda galaxy. The immensity of the night sky overwhelms you. You are but a speck of dust in the vastness of the universe and tears begin rolling down your cheeks. A great loneliness seizes you, a pain in the center of your being.

The Bible suggests that this loneliness comes from a sense that things which belong together have gotten separated; an unspoiled pristine unity has come apart. Genesis 3 is the story of that separation. What has come apart are heaven and earth. Originally they were one. God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. Heaven touched earth in a very real way. What was once one has become divided. But here's the good news, the great truth of the Bible: God longs for Eden, for the original unity, as much as we do.

In Romans 8:18-24 the Apostle speaks of the harsh reality of the fall, which includes our present sufferings, but because of Christian hope, he also gives us a glimpse of future glory: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?"*

The coming of Jesus Christ, his birth, life, death and resurrection, gave us the hope in which we were saved. *In hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.* That bondage and decay began with the first two human beings. The freedom and glory Paul mentions comes through the one human being born to Mary and Joseph in the tiny village of Bethlehem.

Advent is about reawakening a longing within us, the longing for Emmanuel, God-with-us. Our *"groaning as in the pains of childbirth"* becomes rejoicing at the birth of One who has the power and authority to reconcile heaven and earth.

In the days of Adam and Eve heaven once walked the earth. In the days of Jesus of Nazareth heaven walked the earth in human flesh. And even though smart people do really dumb things, in the days to come, heaven and earth will be joined as one.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel. Come Lord Jesus! Amen.