

September 16, 2018
Sermon Series: Conflict & Reconciliation
Theme: Creation and Conflict
Preacher: Katie Misz

Genesis 2:15-18

Theme: God's peace is only possible within a diverse community. So if you are in conflict, don't separate yourself.

I often imagine the day when I will meet God face to face. We are always on the beach walking together, just me and God and I will ask a million questions. Or maybe just walk in silence, I don't know doesn't matter...as long as we are walking on the beach, because to me, the beach is the ideal part of God's creation.

Eden means Ideal. And Adam got to walk with God like this in the IDEAL world. Probably along the most beautiful beach of all time.

This had to be GOOD, right?

That's why it's so surprising when we open our scripture today, and God says, it is *not* good.

But everything's been good, right? God saw the day and the night and it was GOOD! God saw the land and the sea, and it was GOOD! God saw the creatures and they were GOOD!

What is *NOT* good about this ideal picture of Eden....a heaven-like beach walk with God? (I feel my dreams crumbling a little bit)

The problem, God says, is that Adam is alone. The picture is incomplete.

But Adam had so much going for him. He was living the perfect country song.

- He was a farmer. He was a hard worker. He was experiencing freedom. He was given a choice by God. He's the rugged, individualistic, American icon. Give that man a guitar.
- This Individualism is something I value. I value self-sufficiency, Midwestern work ethic, freedom, and independence... For instance, I

felt as a young woman, I had to prove I could live on my own before I got married. Because I didn't need a husband to be okay in this world...I wanted to prove my capabilities. I don't regret that time of self-discovery and fierce independence - (though there was that one time that my independence resulted in an unfortunate and epic almost-breakup at a Mexican restaurant with my now husband...) Sometimes I am individualistic to a fault. I confess I often have higher expectations of myself than everyone else around me. And I'm less gracious to myself when I fail than I would be to anyone else....these are all signs of individualism.... But American individualism is an incomplete picture. Individualism is not peace.

God looked at Adam and his individualism....and said "It is not good for man to be alone."¹

So God made Eve.

And when God created Eve, God created diversity.
There are now different opinions, different voices, different perspectives.

John Paul Lederach, in his book *Reconcile*, tells us that inherent in God's creation of diversity is the creation of conflict.

At some point, these different opinions won't agree. The different voices will have misunderstandings. The different perspectives will clash.

The garden was not an empty beach. It was a beautiful, rich, mess. A beautiful, rich, mess of conflict.² (Heaven is described as a city. It's bustling. It's bumping into people on the subway...it's a million different smells of trying international cuisine. And hearing a hundred languages as you walk down the street... it's what we actually want and what we need)

The Bible describes peace as wholeness and completeness. (It is not serenity. Not necessarily quiet. It is not wishing your neighbor's dog would stop barking, or the kid across the street would stop practicing the trumpet outside, or trains

¹ Genesis 2:18

² John Paul Lederach, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, Herald Press (August 11, 2014), 67.

wouldn't blow their whistles in the middle of the night. Though I do wish for those things on a weekly basis – Peace, or the Biblical word shalom, is different. It is the world being as it should be. Everyone's needs met. All voices equally valued. Cultures and differences celebrated.

Conflict entered the scene before sin entered the scene.³ Before Adam and Eve ate the apple, there was already conflict. This is so hard to wrap our heads around, because we have never experienced conflict without the pain of sin. If you could extract pain, hurt, meanness, power out of a conflict, what would it be like?

I wonder what it's like to imagine Eden as a place with diversity and conflict.

- I wonder if Adam and Eve liked different fruit. So Eve didn't like what Adam made for dinner, and had to figure out how to admit that it was nasty. Did she eat it anyways?
- I wonder if Eve's snoring kept Adam awake at night. Or if Adam stole the covers.
- I wonder if they disagreed about everyday life... Like how to spend their time, who does the chores and when, how to feel heard and respected, when to be together and when to be apart?
- I wonder if Adam, Eve, and God, in their community...if they had times one of them felt misunderstood? If they weren't connecting?

Conflict is not wrong or evil. Conflict was created by God, and was present even before sin entered the world. This is good news. Conflict doesn't make God mad. It is the place where we grow. The place we experience God.

Our Scripture today claims conflict as a natural part of human existence. As natural as the thirst in our mouths, the hunger in our bellies, and the desire to lay down and sleep....(maybe even right now).

When you have NO conflict in your life and in your relationships....this does not mean that you are living in peace. It might actually mean that you are living too much like Adam was... *alone and independent*.

³ See Lederach, *Reconcile*, chapter 4.

Dr. Emmanuel Katongole is a priest and a writer who tells the story of a church in Malaysia that was economically and ethnically diverse, and therefore ridden with a history conflict and struggle.⁴ Families and countries who fought each other for generations..... And the pastor, aware of the history and tension, noticed how people tolerantly walked through the doors, sat in their pew, and left the worship space without ever looking the other in the eye who was sitting on the other side of the sanctuary.

The pastor then noticed the irony that each week, the church would start the service with a greeting, saying, “Grace and peace to you in the name of the Lord Jesus”. The next week, the church doors were locked when the people came to church. The pastor met the people on the steps and informed them that their greeting of grace and peace was a lie because there was no peace. They would not enter the church until each person shook each person’s hand and offered the peace of Christ.

The next hour was full of awkward silence, tears, and finally, the shaking of hands. That’s when the fellowship began. This diverse group of people began having real family relationships where they bickered, fought, struggled, and forgave each other repeatedly. In discovering the messy, real family relationships with one another, they discovered God in their midst. The church began to thrive.

If you value diversity, you must also value conflict.

Waterford, we cannot be a diverse community until we are one that accepts conflict.

In conflict, we are prone to be alone. To regress into individualism and isolation.

Here’s what it looks like. We separate ourselves in conflict when we:

- **Maintain distance** – this is what happened in the Malaysia community, and it is a common symptom of American Christianity. You can avoid

⁴ The story is from Katongole, Emmanuel. (2007). Greeting: Beyond Racial Reconciliation. In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (eds S. Hauerwas and S. Wells), as well as lecture discussion at Duke Divinity School.

conflict if you don't get too close to anyone. And you can go to church week after week as a spectator without really getting into the grit of life with others.

- **Walk away** (I'm not talking about needing a cool-off period. That is good. But how long will the cool-off last? If you need a cool-off, agree with the other person of when you will pick up the conversation again so that they can give you the space you need while also having the security of a lasting connection)
- **Be quiet.** Be the quiet in the land – (This was supposed to mean we were humble and didn't need to be in the spotlight – didn't seek after power. But it's turned into meaning we should not be loud or angry or have a lot to say!) But your voice matters. Your perspective IS unique and diverse and that is a good thing.
- **Leave.** (Note...if you are in an abusive situation, verbal or physical, please surround yourself with healthy community who will discern with you when and how to leave. This is a different scenario)
 - What I am talking about is the Mennonite problem of leaving before a hard conversation can even be had. We are seeing this all over our conference and churches. When it looks like it's getting hard, we pull out of the conversation, pull out of the church. And leave. Don't do that.
- **Diminish Diversity.** We surround ourselves with people who look, think, and act like we do. They take our side on issues. We share the same enemies.

Peace is not the absence of conflict. Peace is the presence of conflict.

We are going to finish this morning by passing the peace.

This will be our response to the sermon. Our reflection together...

Maybe there has been a conflict you have been avoiding. Somebody's hand you have been unwilling to shake. May this time of passing the peace be a time to claim that right here, right in this Holy space of the sanctuary is a place that is full of conflict. Maybe you are brave today and you extend your hand to the one you have been avoiding.

Or Maybe you have been in the midst of a long-term conflict with somebody. And you are aware of how much it hurts. Maybe today you are beat up from the long, tiring, work of reconciliation and as you shake the hands of others in the body of Christ, receive their hand with the warmth as God's love and acceptance, saying to you, "Peace is not the absence of conflict. Your struggle is beautiful and courageous. Well done good and faithful servant. Thank you for your work of peace"

When you hear the music begin, you may return to your seats for the remainder of our worship together.

Benediction:

On the 6th day, God looked at what God had made. And God saw all the nature and trees, the creatures God had made, and God looked and saw the man and woman and God saw their differing opinions, their mess, their misunderstandings, their clashes and their conflicts. And God said what God had made and said this is VERY Good.

Go in God's Shalom.