

Lent I A

The term “mansplaining” has taken off in popular culture in the last 12 months;

The phenomenon of a man explaining, to a woman, something she knows plenty well herself.

“See, honey, here is how it is.”

And there follows some supposed enlightenment about some aspect of business, culture, politics, or economy.

My wife will tell you I love to tell her new things from the latest book I read and will give mini-lectures on them, whether she is interested or not.

Parents of young children get a lot of time to explain generally.

My younger son still asks lots of “why” questions about the way the world works.

Those questions demand answers but lead to more questions, some of which he asks and some of which I ask.

We all know that feeling of trying to explain something we long ago lost our curiosity in, of explaining something that we long ago began to take for granted.

We just do...that’s just the way it is...ask your Mother, she’s the chemist...or why do you think it is that way?

These are among my standard replies.

Then later, I google it and tell him exactly why something is the way it is.

There is a lot to be said for explanation, if it is offered in humility and is accurate.

It is a quick way to a fuller knowledge, communicated from one person to another.

Explanation can also be vile; some explanations are pernicious, false, and destructive.

The explainer can abrogate all power to himself or herself in the process.

The explainer can demonize when he connects cause and effect, when she casts blame, when she categorizes.

Explaining can define reality; much of the trouble between human beings is about competing explanations.

Our marriage is failing because you did this! No it is because you did that!

Our country is in trouble because of this! No, because of that.

Our ancestors in faith, our ancestors generally, did less explaining as direct discourse and more explaining by way of stories.

They wondered about the same things about which we wonder, when we bother to wonder.

How did we get here?

Why are we here?

Who is in charge?

Are we actually free?

About these things the Hebrew people wondered; for them, explanations were sought.

This story of Adam and Eve speaks to the great questions we still ask.

Note first that the entire and encompassing purpose of humanity is explained in the opening sentences of the passage.

We were placed in the garden of creation to keep and till it.

Take it quite literally for a moment; we were put here to care for the creation and bring it to increase.

Our first calling is to cultivate the earth, turn over the soil, make things grow.

So those of you with a box in the garden out back are doing God's will; those of you with seed packets ready to go into the ground are holy.

And the real farmers, of whom we have none in the church, are actually and fully living into their human vocation, if we take this passage literally.

But what about the rest of us, who work in stores, schools, and offices?

Does keep and till extend to us?

Metaphorically, it certainly can.

Our cultivation may not be of the soil but of the mind, of the community.

It may be of the stock market, the real state market.

We till, we work in all sorts of ways.

Those ways are meant to be in accord with the "keep" part of the charge as well.

However we till, it must not destroy but enrich and preserve the creation.

And so the first of our questions are answered in the story, perhaps not to our liking.

Who put here and why?

God put us here; here to work, and to work with care and intention.

The story then works on the question of our freedom.

If our origin is in God, one of supreme goodness and authority, and our function is clear; to work, till, and keep the creation, as a gift from God; then:

are we free? Or are we slaves?

The serpent told Eve that we were slaves but did not have to be, that we could be free if only we would seize the knowledge of good and evil.

Here the explainer and the phenomenon of explanation appears, offering one take on things as **the** take on things,

determined to turn things in his favored direction.

And his explanation carried the day, and all was lost.

Their innocence; their ease in the creation; their connection to God

all disrupted when they accepted the explanation of the explainer, the serpent.

It was a tragic moment.

They would find in subsequent days that this explanation had been false; exactly the opposite of reality.

Though they had a Creator and had been given work to do, they were free before they grasped the fruit.

They were innocent, in a garden that produced abundantly.

After the fall, they were on their own, and the ground was hard, and work felt like slavery, and marriage was hard, and childbirth hurt.

And then compulsions were all around them.

Their wills were in chains.

That is how those who wrote the story felt and how we feel some, maybe all of the time.
Compelled to work, locked in daily routines, distant from a former joy, removed from a former innocence.

Like our mythic ancestors, perhaps we have accepted false explanations.

That money or stuff or even marriage would make us whole;

That we could be free, because we can afford to travel or have a house in a different place.

But we find that the geographic cure doesn't work, no matter what the real estate brochure or website promised.

Wherever you go, there you are, and you took your problems with you.

Many people who seek a better place find a worse one.

And so we needed a savior, a second Adam, to offer a different way and a new explanation.

And we see Jesus, tempted to accept the explanations of Satan, the invitations, to presume on his authority.

And we see Jesus, offering his own version of the story, resorting to Scripture, insisting he will live by the Word of God; that he will not test God; that he will only serve his Father.

This is the opposite of Eve and Adam's behavior in the garden.

Jesus rejected the false explanation offered to him; they slipped into it, tried it on for size, and it stuck.

Jesus retained his God given freedom as he proclaimed his Father's authority;

They became slaves as they accepted the hollow freedom of the Serpent's lies.

We are the spiritual descendents of Adam and Eve,

and we are those who have accepted the story about Jesus and his love as foundational to our lives.

Each day offers us the chance to reject false explanations and reach for the true ones.

The real explanations about why we are here, about who we are, about what we are meant for, these are found in Christ and in his teaching left to us in the Scriptures.

The invitation of these forty days is be rooted in that faithful, life-giving, explanation.