

“I Know It’s My Fault”

Genesis 3:8-12 Matthew 25:31-40

Often when I have couples pick out their Bible readings for their wedding service, they choose Genesis 2:22-25 . . . ²²And the rib that the Lord GOD had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." ²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Some couples want the last verse left off and others want it left on, depending on where they’re at with the whole “naked” thing.

In the next verses, immediately after Adam and Eve are brought together, Eve is tempted by the serpent to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree in the middle of the garden. She eats and of course she shares the delicious fruit with her husband. Suddenly, they realize they’re naked and they hid from God. You can’t hide from God.

God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat?”

The man said, “the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” There has always been a woman to blame.

One of the great song writers of our time, Jimmy Buffett, understood that. I’ve always appreciated his lyrics, especially after taking youth groups from here and from Nebraska to week-long servant camps on Key West. Being in his environment helped me to understand his songs.

I especially came to appreciate his biggest hit – “Margaritaville”. Not because it’s a party song but because it represents an essential journey of self-discovery, especially for men. Allow me to explain.

The song begins with the narrator relaxing in his front porch swing while boiling shrimp and watching tourists. But this envy-inducing lifestyle quickly devolves into an admission that he is an utter failure, wasting away in a tequila-induced stupor. He doesn’t know why he’s there. He’s certain of nothing except that he was too drunk to remember how he got his tattoo, a “Mexican cutie”.

He later admits that only a “frozen concoction” can help him.

And who does he *blame* for his sorry state?

Anyone but himself – at first.

Despite popular opinion that there must be a woman to blame, the narrator takes the easy way out and decides “it’s nobody’s fault”. In the next stanza, he decides; “it *could* be my fault”. At the end of song, at last, he admits, “I *know* it’s my own damn fault”.

The journey of self-discovery is one we all should take. We so easily blame others for our problems until we embrace the notion that we are likely responsible for our situations. I am particularly moved by Jimmy’s line, “Some people claim that there’s a woman to blame”. Historically, there is *always* a woman to blame – from Eve in the Garden of Eden to Joan of Arc, Catherine the Great, Marie Antoinette, the women accused in the Salem Witch Trials, and today’s strong, female politicians, like Nicki Haley who are demonized on both sides of the aisle.

And for men, we often blame the woman closest to us – our wives.

It's nobody's fault, but in Man School, we precisely learn the words to use to belittle our partners and make them feel bad about themselves without even realizing we're doing it, not because women are overly sensitive to our suggestions (criticism), but because our behavior is typically a projection of our own incompetence, and a projection by definition, comes from the unconscious.

Nowhere in my own life is this more apparent than in my refusal to own a computer other than my cell phone. So, I'm completely dependent on Lori in the office and Danette at home to do computer stuff for me.

They show me e-mails knowing I hate e-mails because they enable people to say things they would never say in person. Lori helps me find slides to illustrate my sermons. Danette takes care of my health care stuff and other business online. Occasionally, when I lose patience with Danette, it's because I'm oblivious to the fact that "It's my own damn fault" for being so "old-school".

It's no wonder that I'm no longer allowed in the room when she's on the computer. Jimmy Buffett was right. There is no woman to blame. It's my own fault.

I know it's my fault when I'm not feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, or visiting the sick. As a congregation, as Divinity Lutheran Church and our many ministries, we know when we serve people in need, we are serving Jesus.

But sometimes out there in the world on our own, Jesus can suddenly appear next to us. I share with you a true story...

"I am a mother of three (ages 14, 12, & 3) and have recently completed my college degree. The last class I had to take was Sociology.

The teacher was absolutely inspiring with the qualities that I wish every human being had been graced with. Her last project of the term was called “Smile”. The class was asked to go out and smile at three people and document their reactions. I am a very friendly person and always smile at everyone and say hello anyway – so, I thought this would be a piece of cake, literally. Soon after we were assigned the project, my husband, youngest son, and I went out to McDonald’s, on a crisp March morning. It was just our way of sharing special play time with our son. We were standing in line, waiting to be served, when all of a sudden everyone around us began to back away. And then even my husband did.

I did not move an inch – an overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside of me as I turned to see why they had moved. As I turned around, I smelled a horrible “dirty body” smell – and there standing behind me were two poor homeless men. As I looked down at the short gentleman, close to me, he was “smiling”. His beautiful sky-blue eyes were full of God’s light as he searched for acceptance. He said “Good day” as he counted the few coins he had been clutching. The second man fumbled with his hands as he stood behind his friend. I realized the second man was mentally deficient and the blue-eyed gentle man was his salvation. I held my tears – as I stood there with them. The young lady at the counter asked him what they wanted. He said, “coffee is all miss” because that was all they could afford to sit in the restaurant and warm up, they had to buy something – he just wanted to be warm.

Then I really felt it – the compulsion was so great I almost reached out and embraced the little man with the blue eyes. That is when I noticed all eyes in the restaurant were set on me – judging my every action. I smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give me two more breakfast meals on a separate tray.

I then walked around the corner to the table that the men had chosen as a resting spot. I put the tray on the table and laid my hand on the blue-eyed gentleman's cold hand. He looked up at me, with tears in his eyes, and said "Thank You". I leaned over, began to pat his hand and said, "I did not do this for you . . . God is here working through me to give you hope". I started to cry as I walked away to join my husband and son. When I sat down my husband smiled at me and said, "That is why God gave you to me, honey . . . to give me hope".

We held hands for a moment and at that time we knew that only because of the grace that we had been given, were we able to give. That day showed me the pure light of God's sweet love. I returned to college, on the last evening of class, with this story in hand. I turned in "My Project" and the instructor read it. She looked up at me and said, "Can I share this?"

I slowly nodded as she got the attention of the class. She began to read and that is when I knew that we, as human beings and being part of God, share this need to heal people, and be healed. In my own way I touched the people at McDonald's, my husband, son, instructor, and every soul that shared the classroom on the last night I spent as a college student. I graduated with one of the biggest lessons I would ever learn – unconditional acceptance. Much love and compassion is sent to each and every person who may hear this, and learn how to love people and use things – not love things and use people.

May the peace of God . . .

#631 – Love Divine, All Loves Excelling