

“True Love Gives Life”

February 19, 2023
King City United Church
Rev. Padre Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

O Lord, may the words of your mouth be our daily bread, and may the leading of your Spirit become our way, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Genesis 3:8-13

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

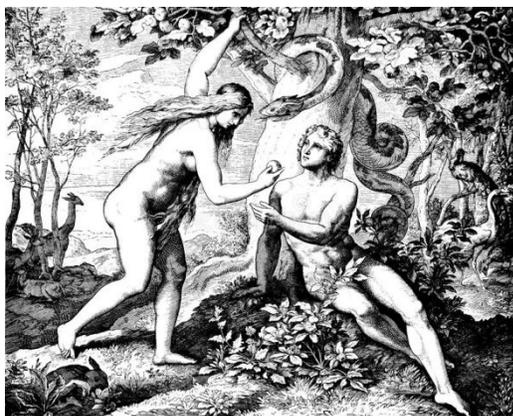
Romans 5:18-19

¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

This is the Word of God.
Thanks be to God.

<Children's Time>

Good morning my friends! We can definitely feel warmth now because the snow piled on the sidewalk has almost disappeared! Spring is going to come soon. What is your plan for this spring? Getting your driver's license? Going on a bicycle ride with Dad? Watching forgs in the swamp? I have a plan for this spring, and I'd like to share it with you; I'm going to go to an art gallery often! Listen, I can sing at some level, but I can barely paint, so I instead chose to feel the artwork, not to create artwork. So today, I brought this picture. Let's feel the artwork together and share the hidden story.



Here, in this painting, one man and a lady are communicating with each other, while a snake on the tree faces the lady. The lady seems to give something to the man, and the man is about to receive it.

This type of painting or artwork is very famous because it describes a Bible story in Genesis. The background of the scene is the Garden of Eden, a.k.a. the paradise that God has prepared for Adam and Eve, the first humans on the earth. The Garden of Eden was perfect for them; everything was prepared for them, and they enjoyed all the fruits and products. But the one thing that God banned was eating the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." That is the tricky part. Imagine if your mom goes to work, saying, "My kids, do not open this box until I come back." And she leaves. Then you are wondering so much about the box that you must fight against your desire to open the box. If she didn't mention the box, you would ignore it. But once she declares the rule and mentions the box, you can't help but thinking about the box. I can't prove the reason; however, humans are

made this way. It is almost always true that "curiosity kills the cat!" So it is for Adam and Eve. They could enjoy everything in the garden, but they had to resist their interest for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At the strongest moment of curiosity, a serpent comes and tempts them to eat the forbidden fruit. The Bible says they were kicked out of paradise, cursed, and had to work hard until they died. It sounds like a sad story for humans. They were sent away and lived with pain and suffering. When I read this story in the Bible, I hated Adam and Eve because without their sins, humans would live in the garden enjoying unlimited fruits for free. At the same time, I was very suspicious of why God prepared both blessings and curses in the Garden of Eden. And why didn't God forgive them of their sins? It was just the first mistake, right?

Later, when I thought it over and over again, I realized that the story's main focus is God's blessings, not curses. Why? Because, first, we can still eat delicious fruits from the earth, which cannot be harvested from any other planets in the universe. Second, your parents are doing hard work, but from that labour, you can enjoy your life. Third, your parents have difficult time to raise you, but they also feel the joy and happiness to be with you in their lives.

God gives all these blessings, not curses; a life of abundance, joy and happiness. God is so good, so do not leave God but stick to God, the source of blessings. May God be with you at this moment. Amen.

Hymn: "Three Things I Promise"

MV176 v.1

Three things I promise, Holy God, in age and youth, in life and death: to bless your Name, and cling to Christ, and listen for the Spirit's breath.

<Reflection>

The story of the Garden of Eden has loaded metaphors; the first human, Adam, Eve who is made from Adam's rib, a crafty serpent, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, etc. Due to the wide range of spectrum, it gives various topics and themes to preachers, such as human sin, the deceiving serpent and Satan in modern times, and sometimes, inferiority of woman because she was tempted and deceived by the serpent, or even I read a sermon about purity and innocence of Eve because she doesn't tell a lie to God. I'd like to make sure that the story of the Garden of Eden is not about admitting a woman as an inferior character or innocent. Do not get involved with these shallow conversations that distract from the genuine meaning. I believe you won't. Besides that topic, most of them have interesting points, and I can tell that our faith has formed from those learning at some point in our life.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul repeatedly explains in Romans chapter 5 that one man's trespass and disobedience made humans sinners and led to condemnation. And Augustine, a great theologian, elaborates on the first sin of humans as the original sin. So many teachings have been derived from the Augustinian explanation of original sin. I am not standing against or resisting against Genesis, Romans, the Apostle Paul, and Augustine. Instead, I'd like to open up the other side of sin and curse.

In Genesis, as we know, God prepares the paradise, and humans' disobedience happens. Due to their tempting trials, they are expelled to the East of Eden. Although the Bible says it is about the curse that God imposes, how was their life in the barren land, which was not part of the paradise? Was it deathly awful? Was it miserable? Was it full of pain and suffering?

An American novelist John Steinbeck holds in his novel "East of Eden" that humans have the freedom to face the destiny of sin, pain, and suffering throughout life. He says,

"And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any idea, religion, or government which limits or destroys the individual. This is what I am and what I am about."¹

And I find all the blessings in hardships in life. Surprisingly, Apostle Paul says the same. He says, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"² in Romans 5:20. Sin and grace are like both sides of a coin. We experience hardship, but we Christians find a diamond blessing from the rough difficulties. When we give thanks to God in the midst of hardship, that gratitude would be genuine, and that would be a true experience of divine grace because, as Apostle Paul says today, Jesus makes us righteous; because Jesus opens the door of life; the true sacrifice and true love gives life to us all.

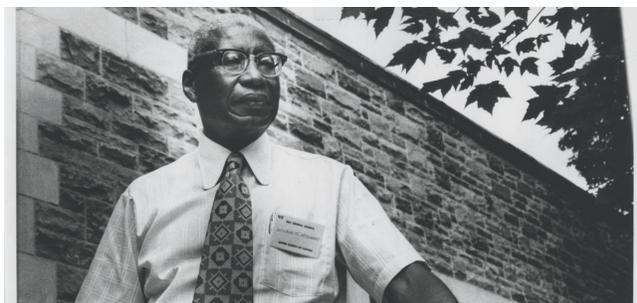
The United Church of Canada and our society celebrate February as Black History Month. So I brought a story of Wilbur Howard (1912-2001) who experienced true grace and gave genuine gratitude to God.

"Wilbur Kenneth Howard (1912-2001) was a United Church minister and Moderator of the United Church. He was born in Toronto, graduated in

¹ John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*.

² Romans 5:20 b.

theology from Emmanuel College and was ordained by Toronto Conference in 1941."³



When he was initially invited to a church by his neighbour, his heart had been offered to God and didn't go away. He graduated from the theological seminary of the UCC and was ordained in 1941, but he was not able to find a church to serve due to his skin colour. Can you imagine that; a 29-year-old young adult who finished his master's degree in theology but couldn't find a congregation to serve, even though the UCC churches were anxiously recruiting a minister to serve a church due to the lack of qualified candidates at the time of WW2? After fourteen years of patience and consistency in his faith, he received a call from a church at the age of 53. Can you sense his patience, consistency, and strong faith in God and the church? His hardship made a historic milestone in the UCC, and later he served as Moderator of the United Church of Canada from 1974 to 1977.

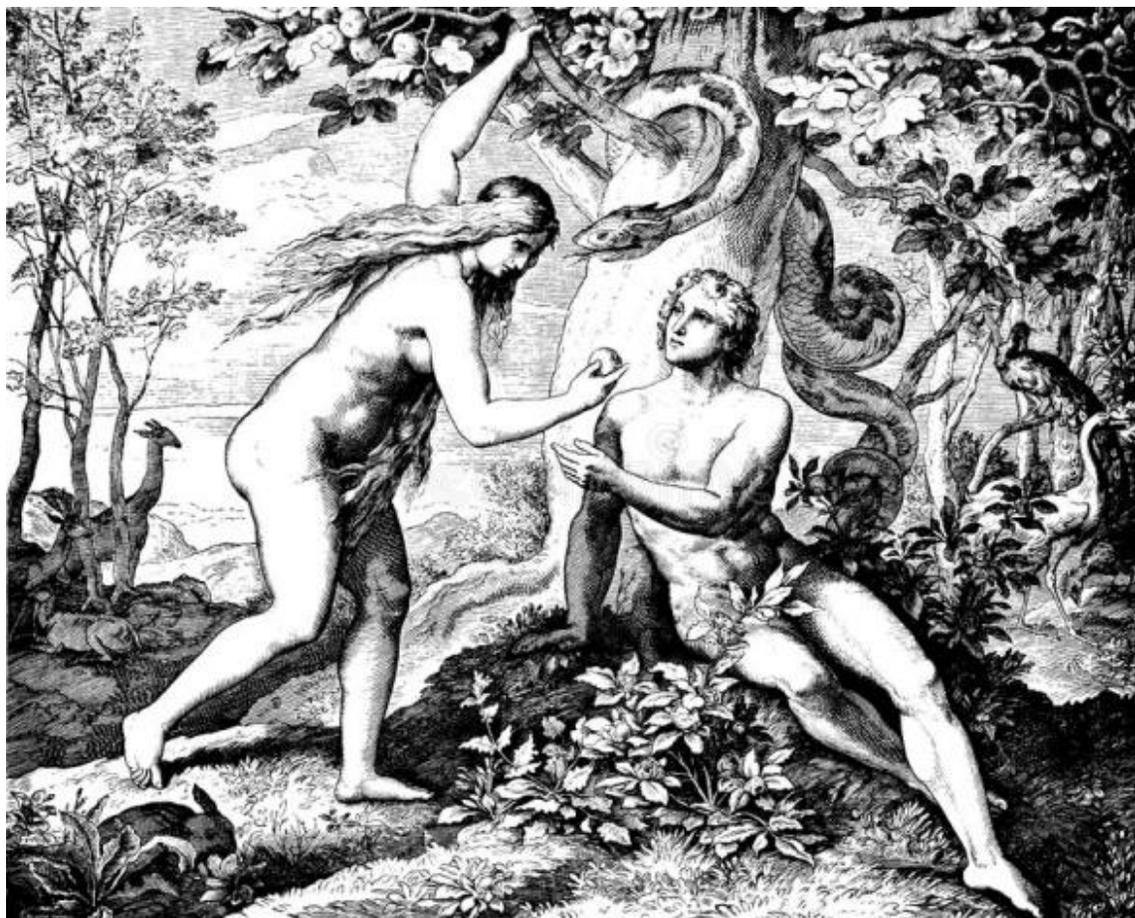
Jesus opens the door of his life. And I believe Jesus consistent and true love gives reasons to Wilbur Howard. And Jesus is also gives us the reasons to live to us all. From the deep faith, Wilbur Howard was able to give deep and genuine thanks to God throughout his life.

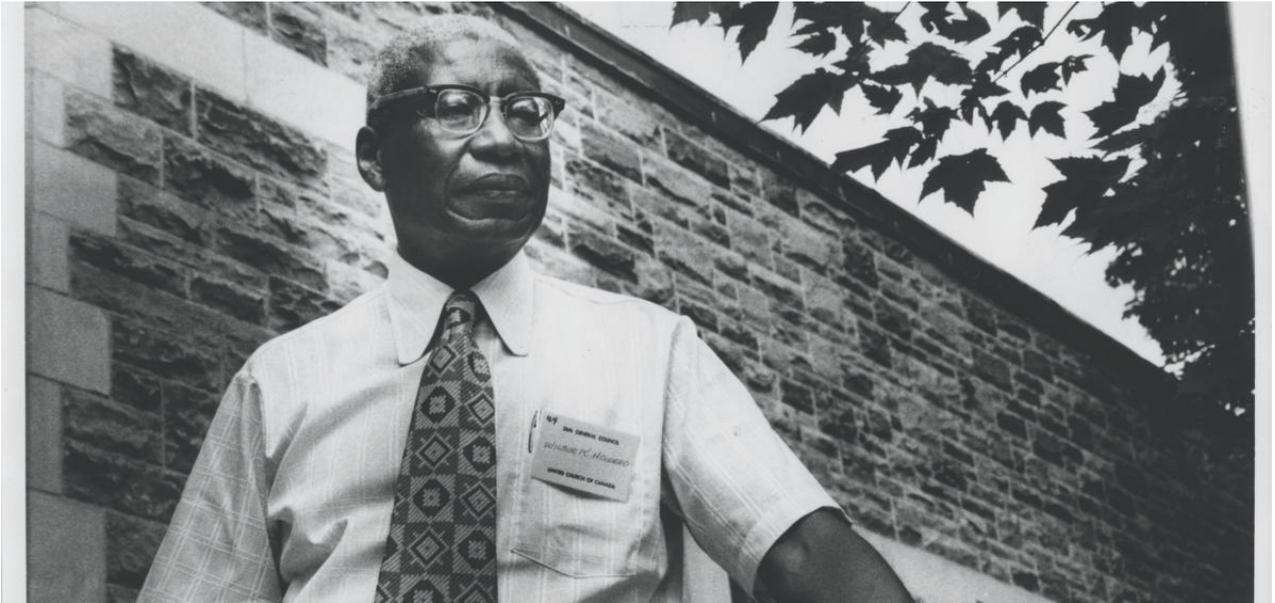
Sisters and brothers, we cannot change the immense social system that Rev. Howard faced all at once. And yet, we can celebrate God's presence in our life. We might not be the great person that human history remembers, but we can be God's agent, like Wilbur Howard's neighbour who

³ The UCC Archives, access as of Feb. 17, 2023; <https://catalogue.unitedchurcharchives.ca/rev-wilbur-howard-dean>

passed the Gospel. And the agent's small acts initiate the undermining of the corrupt social system.

We are not God, and we cannot fix all human faults all at once. Instead, we can be an agent for Gospel, celebrating God's blessings. And that Gospel, not us, gives people life and vitality. Believe in God, and do not be suspicious about the power of healing and salvation. Just be an agent, knowing that God prepares blessings for us even in the time of hardships. That's all we are asked. And let's confess to God our stories of grace; let's share our stories of genuine and deep gratitude to God, just as Wilbur Howard experienced in his lifetime. Pondering the word of God, let us pray silently.





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