

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles

Third Sunday After Pentecost – June 10, 2018

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Genesis 3:8-15

FOR REFLECTION

“It's a facet of the gay rights movement that people don't think about enough. Why suddenly marriage equality? Because it wasn't until 1981 that the court struck down Louisiana's 'head and master rule,' that the husband was head and master of the house.”

~ Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court

“It is not women's liberation, it is women's and men's liberation.”

~ Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court

#NotoriousRBG

The power of story is never more apparent than with our human creation myth from Genesis. This story has been used for thousands of years – first orally – then in written form – to explain why women are supposed to be subordinate to men – and then to perpetuate the social condition of inequality. The earliest version of the story in Genesis 1 states that two genders were created simultaneously and equally.

1:27 So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

The second story recorded in Genesis 2 declares that God intended all humans to be male – and pulled females out of the first human to help them out.

2:22 And **the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman** and brought her to the man.

Both stories are in the book – but one has gotten way more press than the other. We will also note that non-binary genders were invisible and unmentionable.

Then comes the story of human disobedience in Genesis 3:

3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that **the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.**

The male human is not without agency here. The fruit was not stuffed into his mouth. The female may have picked it – but she thought it was wisdom fruit and offered it to

her companion. He chose to eat it. Both are culpable in disobeying this mythological rule laid down by their Maker.

And, as we see in our text this morning, each of them chooses to blame someone else for their own transgression. The man blames the woman, the woman blames the snake – no one takes responsibility for their actions. And much like human parents with kids who refuse to accept responsibility – punishment is meted out. And this mythological punishment has been a set up for messed up gender relations ever since:

16 To the woman he said,
'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.'

Gender subordination. Bam!

17 And to the man he said,
'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
"You shall not eat of it",
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Don't listen to your wife. She'll only bring trouble. Gender subordination. Bam!

And it is THIS cultural underlying myth in Jewish, Christian, Muslim societies, in particular, that has perpetuated such subordination to this day. It is no wonder that the pervasive permission for men to do what they want with women with tacit approval and without consequence – has led to a #metoo movement with traction – now that social media is allowing subcultures to organize and strategize and communicate their truth in substantially new ways.

Another reason women have found a voice is #NotoriousRBG.

[Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader] Ginsburg's ferocious retorts to the Fisher v. University of Texas decision that weakened Affirmative Action laws, and the Shelby County v. Holder decision, which gutted the Voting Rights Act, made her the hero of the internet and at least some portions of the nation.

[NYU law student] Shana Knizhnik, 25, explained that... after the Fisher and Shelby decisions, and Ginsburg's disemboweling dissents, her social media feeds were aflame with gratitude toward the court's eldest justice, now 8[5].

One of Knizhnik's friends was the person who first left a comment about Ginsburg with the hashtag #notoriousRBG... "It is impossible not to be amazed by Ginsburg," Knizhnik told me by phone from Washington, D.C., where she is working this summer in the public defender's office. She made the website and designed a t-shirt the same night...

<https://newrepublic.com/article/118641/ruth-bader-ginsburg-memes-how-internet-fell-love-her>

The hashtag adoration comes late in Ginsburg's life and work – in which she has been a force to be reckoned with in our American legal landscape. She grew up female and Jewish – and an introvert – all of which led to exclusion and painful experiences that shaped her character.

[Ruth's mother] Celia took an active role in her daughter's education, often taking her to the library. Celia had been a good student in her youth, graduating from high school at age fifteen, yet she could not further her own education because her family instead chose to send her brother to college.

In the fall of 1956, Ginsburg enrolled at Harvard Law School, where she was one of only nine women in a class of about five hundred men. The Dean of Harvard Law reportedly asked the female law students, including Ginsburg, "How do you justify taking a spot from a qualified man?"

[Unable to secure a position in a law firm due to her gender] Her first position [was] as a professor at Rutgers School of Law in 1963... Ginsburg was informed she would be paid less than her male colleagues because she had a husband with a well-paid job...

In 1970, she co-founded the Women's Rights Law Reporter, the first law journal in the U.S. to focus exclusively on women's rights. From 1972 to 1980, she taught at Columbia, where she became the first tenured woman and co-authored the first law school casebook on sex discrimination...

In 1972, Ginsburg co-founded the Women's Rights Project at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and, in 1973, she became the ACLU's general counsel. The Women's Rights Project and related ACLU projects participated in over three hundred gender discrimination cases by 1974. As the director of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project, **she argued six gender discrimination cases before the Supreme Court between 1973 and 1976, winning five. Rather than asking the court to end all gender discrimination at once, Ginsburg charted a strategic course, taking aim at specific discriminatory statutes and building on each successive victory. She chose plaintiffs carefully, at times picking male plaintiffs to demonstrate that gender discrimination was harmful to both men and women...**

Ginsburg represented a widower denied survivor benefits under Social Security, which permitted widows but not widowers to collect special benefits while caring for minor children. She argued it discriminated against male survivors of workers denying them the same protection as their female counterparts...

Ginsburg was nominated by President Jimmy Carter on April 14, 1980, to a seat on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit... President Bill Clinton nominated her as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court on June 14, 1993...

Later, colleague Antonin Scalia [a good friend of hers] praised Ginsburg's skills as an advocate, "she became the leading (and very successful) litigator on behalf of women's rights—the Thurgood Marshall of that cause, so to speak"...

[Two bouts of cancer during which she did not miss a day on the bench left her physically weak.] Since 1999, Bryant Johnson, a former Army reservist attached to the Special Forces, has trained Ginsburg twice weekly in the justices-only gym at the Supreme Court. [She lifts weights, planks and does cardio]...she was able to complete twenty full push-ups in a session before her 80th birthday.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Bader_Ginsburg

See the movie “RBG” – there is so much more to this woman than I could ever describe here. Her strategy of dismantling gender-discrimination law-by-law has changed the status of women in our society... given us openings for equality with men that are now being defended and cranked open by continued effort. She changed the rules – which is why Weinstein and others are now in court. She changed the rules which is why women’s pay is creeping closer to men’s. She changed the rules which is why women are increasingly in the military, on corporate boards and on judicial benches – not to mention in congress and on presidential tickets.

Of course, there are others who are less notorious who have fought the fight – before and with her. My mother was on a women’s commission for the Southern California Conference of the United Church of Christ – a small group of women who caused enough of a ruckus about inclusive language and imagery – to bring a National Staff Person to Pasadena to discuss and then change printed materials offered to the church at large. My mother attended Claremont School of Theology a decade before I did – and when I got there in the 1980’s – nearly half the students were women and all papers had to be written in inclusive language. No more “mankind” or “father god” when doing scholarly work.

The power of our story in Genesis continues to work on us – continues to be a formidable adversary. But the power of new stories and the voices of the previously invisible and closeted – are restoring us to the first creation story – the one where all of us are created simultaneously and equally.

1:27 So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

We continue to press on our language so that God, too, can be experienced as female AND male AND non-binary, even gender-free. And we continue, with the trail-blazing efforts of the likes of #NotoriousRBG, to take responsibility for our treatment of one another – to free each other from subordination in all its forms – to remake the world in the images of God that populate our universe. Blessed Be.

Scripture Reading for Sunday June 10, 2018 – Third after Pentecost – Year B

Genesis 3:8-15

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."

14 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."