

Eve through Twain, Morrison, Wright and Clifton

Sermon April 12, 2026

Genesis 3:1–7 and John 20:19–31

Diego Garrido Barreto

Dear God, help us rediscover your word, in our words. Help us reshape your stories, in our stories. Give us a taste of your love that is better than the fruits of your garden. Amen.

I was asked by Rev Mark to preach about Eve, this woman and first mother, but I have to admit I struggle. Eve has carried a weight that no one should carry. She has been blamed for sin, for exile, for death, blamed, in many traditions, for the very condition of representing the first woman. So my question starts with: what are we doing with this story? Her story. While the world outside feels chaotic, why are we back into the garden? What is this oral tradition inviting us to rediscover? Well, join me as we try to imagine different alternatives.

Eve is not only a person. Eve marks for many authors the moment when innocence became consciousness, when obedience became questioning. The story tells us that she sees the fruit, that she listens, that she desires, that she takes and eats. For generations I have been told by male authorities that this is called the fall. But I am not so sure. Whoever wrote the book of Genesis, there are two accounts of creation. Were the writers men? Probably. Was this story created by Israelites? Probably not. Let me add another linguistic detail. After this punishment from God happens, Adam calls her Eve, or *Hawwah* in Hebrew, mother of all the living. She is mentioned before as the woman. But why did she not have a name before? Again, this oral tradition is not exempt from its context.

I want to explore through contemporary writers, mostly females, a rediscovery of Eve, a chance to reinvent our stories. We have heard a naturalized version of the story that benefited one gender, to blame his counterpart. Let me start with Mark

Twain. What would Eve and Adam write if they had a diary, and yes, if it was translated to English?

I.

On Monday, Adam wrote: “This new creature with the long hair is a good deal in the way. It is always hanging around and following me about. I don’t like this; I am not used to company. I wish it would stay with the other animals... Cloudy today, wind in the east; *I* think we shall have rain... We? Where did I get that word? I remember now – the new creature used it.”

Eve’s version of Adam and his hunting skills tells us differently:

“I mean I, not we, for I can see that the reptile cares nothing for such things. It has low tastes, and is not kind... I wonder if THAT is what it is for? Hasn't it any heart? Hasn't it any compassion for those little creatures? Can it be that it was designed and manufactured for such ungentle work? It has the look of it.

Mark Twain reveals the difficulties of being together. But, as he writes about Eve, clearly he hasn’t experienced being one. He defined woman’s nature through the voice of Eve: “I already begin to realize that the core and center of my nature is love of the beautiful, a passion for the beautiful...” Well, community, Twain fails to see Eve and I don’t think my mother would agree with this passion for the beautiful. He gets the humor of this couple, but his tradition is not exempt from his context. This diary was published in 1905, way before Women’s Right to Vote.

II.

There is another part of this diary that I loved from Twain. After the exile, after the loss of the garden, Adam realizes it is better to live outside the garden with Eve, than inside a wonderful world without her. This is such a powerful message for today. They may have disobeyed, but they stayed together after. Let me tell you, he could have continued in exile, alone, repairing the supposed fall, being celibate, chaste, but I can’t imagine them wandering the earth, alone, and a thousand years later crossing paths again. In this mythology, the origin of humanity comes from realizing they were naked, and that they were together.

I think we bite daily the fruits of information, of the knowledge of good and evil. Open the news. I assure you you will know the knowledge of good and evil. And then, I realize I am naked too. That the temptation was not the bite, but to think that we can hide from God. And that is my view of the fall. To forget God is beating in our hearts. Maybe, God is teaching them a love that is strong enough to survive the loss of paradise. God also leaves paradise to stay with them in the exile. God is in the two or three gathered, not in the comfortable solitude of our gardens. Ish. I need to re read this again. The garden may be gone, but we still bite the fruits. Our beloved, our desire, our hunger rests in the knowledge that God is in Eve's desire too.

III.

Poet Lucille Clifton names in her poem *Adam thinking* and *Eve thinking* a short view of what Mark Twain imagined first. She writes Eve as whispering to Adam, while he sleeps, her own name, so that in the version of her story she names herself as her own initiative. In another poem, Eve calls Lucifer, the snake, a honey-tongue, smooth talker that slides into her dreams, as if this reptile could fill them with apples. Lucille Clifton is not interested in continuing this one sided version of disobedience, that serves male authorities to punish female roles, but to name female desire, through hunger and challenge, as good Unitarians have done, a hunger of wisdom and a challenge to lose paradise.

Another voice, poet and novelist Toni Morrison, says: "The taste undid my eyes." She begins to see as she tastes. And once you see, you cannot go back. That is the moment when the world opens, and with it, you can see beauty and pain, knowledge of good and evil. I was told to call this a fall, but another poet, Ansel Elkins, she dares to name it differently: "Let it be known: I did not fall from grace. I leapt to freedom." What if Eve is inviting us, all of us, men included, to bite the fruit of knowledge and face together the loss of paradise?

Because telling the story of Adam and Eve is not the worst thing that could have happened to humanity. It can be our chance to imagine and taste a God that goes to exile with the exiled, that migrates with migrants and that journeys within us. We

can see it as a loss of innocence, but there is more. Adam and Eve are invitations to see where the rule creates the desire, and in my heart I wonder. Can we continue, together, the morning after? Can we face the loss of what it used to be paradise, rather than avoiding the bite?

Lucille Clifton adds: “it is your own lush self you hunger for.” The serpent, in this reading, does not introduce something foreign. It names what is already there. What if the serpent was Eve’s own desire? And so the story is no longer about a rule broken, but about a self emerging desire to live outside the garden and be free. Again, community, we are rediscovering different readings of this oral tradition. Do they feel liberating? Maybe fresh? One last one.

Poet Judith Wright, imagining Eve later in life, says: “Adam, has turned himself into something flawless, something beyond fault, something that, in the end, does not exist.” What if we revisit the stories we tell of ourselves? What if paradise was not what she wanted? To make dinner at six, do the fire, put the children to bed and like *Bewitched* do magic with the nose (proceed to do the gesture with the nose)?

This is my opportunity to empower and uplift the female voices of our congregation. And this is me, a man, from Colombia, like Mark Twain. But if I had a chance, I wish I had met Emily Saltonstall Byrd, Mary Lee and all the women before. Eve is not an archetype of disobedience, shame or guilt, but a mother of all humanity.

I want to stay with the archetype of women, of Eve, as givers of life. Who are these givers of life in your life? It is not a coincidence, for me, that our Easter is also centered in the lives of women who went to the sepulchre to look after Jesus. They came to give account of what they saw and to share in their testimony the news that Jesus was alive. Women that kept the fire and enthusiasm, while the fearful and stumbling male disciples were inside, reading the New York Times or watching the TV.

Mark Twain failed to define women through Eve. Female and black writers that I included in this sermon are inviting us to share alternatives of this story that can

bring life to us, today. Eve is no longer, for me, a reason to blame women for the fall, because no one fell.

Community, our roots as unitarians are more like Eve and, yes, to start listening to the snakes of our desires. To taste the fruits of reality and to bear together the consequences of our transgressions to break away from comfortability. I prefer to speak to snakes in community than to be alone, inside a garden, singing like snow white to birds and bunnies. I prefer to be like Eve and Adam and do it together, talk, convince each other and face the possibility that our decisions were made in our way. That God is with our loss of paradise.

Because Resurrection, Easter, is possible thanks to the women who left the commodity of their houses to visit the tomb. Men were more like Thomas, rational, trying to believe by touching Jesus wounds, while, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, and she goes to see the one that reminded her she was beloved. She came to the tomb because she loved.

Dear women of the church. You are in my thoughts today. Jesus is inviting us, saying: "Peace be with you", to rejoice as he shows his hands and his side. Peace be with you all, women of this community, because you don't wait locked with fear, you have demonstrated to me that Jesus is alive, that Jesus is alive in the ways you taught your children the faith. You don't just bring life to the world, but you also transmit the flame of faith.

My invitation today is to surround yourself with Eves, with people that provoke you to bite more fruits, and yes, to eat more fruit. I pray each of you visit Jesus tomb, our Unitarian sign that Jesus is not there anymore, but to find him in our givers of life. Let us prefer to be together in exile, than comfortable and alone in paradise.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer (wasn't prayed, I used another formula)

May the God, whose face the generations rise and pass away, finds us together during the adversities of these times, together as Adam and Eve, together with a dash of humor. May we learn as our grandmothers walked their pilgrimage, guided and rested on your compassion, to search the empty tomb. Be thou to us the cloud and the fire, the fruit of our desires, and the snake of our beating hearts, be thou to us the Happy Easter and the Monday after, when nobody wants to go and visit tombs.

Amen.

Blessing

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.*

Amen.