

Once upon a time the poet Leonard Cohen sang about the
knowledge of good and evil,

“There is a crack in everything: that’s how the light gets in.”

Often we try to cover up cracks, hide them,

or fill them in so they cannot be seen.

We are a little ashamed of them.

But the Bible is full of cracks.

Its authors and editors even seem to delight in them.

Is God’s name Elohim or the unpronounceable name?

Did Noah bring two pairs or six pairs of the animals on the ark?

Was Jesus crucified on the first day of Passover or on the

Preparation Day?

Is Wisdom God’s companion or a form of human foolishness?

The Bible resists the tyranny of a single story.

In fact, I envy Jewish rabbinical tradition,

Where the highest form of worship is theological conversation

about the multiple possibilities of meaning in the texts,

and not to question God and the Scriptures

is to worship less than fully.

One of the biggest cracks in the Bible is in Chapter 2 of Genesis.

The first chapter is that great hymn

of the seven days of Creation,

that we will very likely hear at the Easter Vigil,

when Elohim-God calls everything into being

out of the watery void and calls it very good.

Right in the middle of the fourth verse of chapter 2,

the story shifts, and God's name shifts to the Holy Name,
and God's creative processes shift.

God becomes gardener, and potter,
and academic advisor to human beings.

The stories are clearly, openly, obviously different stories,
and different traditions,

although we interpret them together as the Creation.

In Chapter 2, God plants a garden,
then takes up the dust or clay with water
that springs up from the ground,

forming an earth creature, an Adam from the Adamah,
a human from the humus,

and breathing God's own breath into the pottery person.

The human is given an assignment;
cultivate and protect the garden.

And the human is advised
not to eat from the tree of knowledge.

At this point God judges that something is not good
in the creation; the human is alone.

And so God creates a whole community from the dust,
animals also breathing God's breath,
for the human to judge and to name,
and splits the human in two.

At the end of chapter two,
the garden is beautiful and the animals
and the humans at home. The dust has become beauty.

The humans are naked, or “smooth” in Hebrew.

And things are so beautiful they are not ashamed.

There’s a smoother animal, though.

The serpent speaks the language of the humans.

We overhear their theological conversation:

Did God tell you not to consume the knowledge?

Don’t eat—don’t even touch that.

But don’t you want to know God better, be more Godly?

There’s no commandment not to talk to each other.

They are one community of dust and water

and the breath of God, using God’s breath.

Talking about God and what God meant

is not a bad thing. It’s good. But then they eat.

There are so many questions unanswered here.

Why is it such a big deal to eat fruit,

to desire wisdom, to want to know God better?

How can eating have so many bad consequences?

The serpent tells them the fruit will make them “like God.”

Is the problem that, as Justo Gonzalez suggests,

they forget they are already in the image of God?

Does eating somehow diminish or interfere

with cultivating and protecting? (It does turn out that way.)

As things happen,

how can the serpent be both deceiving them

and telling the truth?

There is a lot the story doesn't give us,

inviting us to want a bite of that fruit of knowledge.

But we know that they learned they were naked,

and they were ashamed.

They covered themselves and hid from God.

Like we do when we are ashamed, they blamed each other,

and their relationships with each other, with everything

become conflicted, sterilized, and unjust.

The soil produces thorns instead of food,

and the beauty and abundance of their life together is cracked.

They are cut off from the tree of life

and will return to the dust.

Another Jewish creation story

comes from the 16th century mystic rabbi Isaac Luria,

(as told by Lawrence Kushner):

“When first setting out to make the world,

God planned to pour a holy light of God’s glory

into everything to make it real.

God prepared vessels to contain this light.

But something went wrong.

The light burst the vessels,

shattering into uncountable broken fragments.

The shards of light scattered everywhere,

and can be found in everything.

But they are a heap of broken pieces,

and the calling of human beings is to find the pieces,

bring them together and mend the world.

This is the meaning of tikkun olam,

the vocation of humanity in Judaism.

Alfred North Whitehead,

mathematician and philosopher, said,

“The teleology of the universe

is directed to the production of beauty.”

And, “God is the poet of the world, leading it with tender
patience by the divine vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”

The woman reached for beauty, her partner ate beauty,

but beauty was not what they learned.

Beauty is a relationship among things,

a community of intensity and harmony.

But beauty can fail;

beauty fades and inhibits itself if it is merely consumed

or repeated and is not adventurous.

Beauty is dynamic and must take risks.

It is breakable.

Beauty by definition returns to the dust.

Unless, moment by moment, it has new life breathed into it.

Unless somehow the light gets in. Or out.

One of the things we rarely remember

when we contemplate the broken pieces of this story

is that God is aiming at beauty still.

And God's creatures walk the roads of the world,
searching for the broken pieces,
for a glimpse of God's vision.

We are the ones God calls to look for the edges,
to fit them together, and to mend the cracks.

We, and the soil, and all creatures
are the instruments of God's aim at beauty.

As Christians, we often read the story of Jesus' temptation

As part of a history,
as undoing the curse that was the consequence
of the fruit of the knowledge tree.

But we understand the story of the garden
not so much as history

but as a way of describing our human situation,
a damaged community of dust,
our relationships shifted into injustice,
our self-reflection drowning in shame and blame,
but somehow still called to mend the world
and mend the glory of God, or at least to love what God loves in
its broken beauty.

Can we read Jesus' temptation in the wilderness that way too?

In the desert dust, fresh from the muddy river of his Baptism,
led by the Holy Spirit into fasting and midterm exams,
hungry, and knowing that he is made from dust
and will return to dust,

Jesus hears the questions the accuser brought from the garden.

He too has his theological debate.

Jesus quotes scripture like a yeshiva student.

His rebuttals come from Deuteronomy:

our lives aren't little magic tricks God does with the dust

but a moving community of love

living on the power of God's creative word.

We are not here to put God to the test

but to lean into loving what God loves

and search for God's glory in the Creation.

And the soil, the land, the earth, the planet

does not belong to us or to the one questioning us.

We belong to it

and to the One whose breath leads us and the world

by a vision more dusty with age and bright with promise
than we can see or know.

We do not secure our own power or existence
or control the destructive results of our efforts to do so.

We can't see or know what the next generation of dust and
beauty will bring. Neither, I think, could Jesus.

But he trusted that God could, and would,

The God who didn't put the earth pair to death on that day.

The God who created from stardust and works even now
To bring new life out of dust.

We, a living and baptized body of Christ on earth,
can trust God too.

I'm going to try to remember this for forty days or so.

