

EVE – Genesis 3 – Cynthia A. Jarvis **Main Points with Discussion Questions**

- The video opens by pointing to a distinction between the subjunctive and indicative moods in language (and in life). Here is the contrast:
“The **indicative mood** is for knowledge, facts, absolutes, for describing what’s real or definite.... when you believe you know for sure what the future will bring.”
“The **subjunctive mood**, on the other hand, is uncertain. It helps you tell what might be. It is the mood of mystery, of faith interwoven with doubt. It’s a held breath, a hand reaching out. It’s humility, deference, the opposite of hubris.”
- Cindy’s thesis is that women may be more likely to do their believing, their living, and their ministry in the subjunctive mood... the mood of mystery where faith is interwoven with doubt, when a held breath or a hand reaching out is about all one can honestly manage.
- Some may think that the subjunctive mood betrays a lack of faith, whereas the indicative mood indicates rock solid orthodoxy. Facts. Absolutes. Certainty. Cindy says, “I hope the women of the Bible might persuade you to think again! Facts and absolutes are statements that presume no leap [of faith] on the part of a believer who already inhabits a certain universe. To borrow Karl Barth’s critique of religion, facts and absolutes are what people believe in instead of God.”

Questions for discussion

- The indicative mood expresses knowledge, facts, absolutes, and certainty. What parts of your life depend on the indicative mood?
- Does your Christian faith require facts, absolutes, and certainties? What do you make of the statement that “facts and absolutes are statements that presume no leap [of faith] on the part of a believer...?” Or that “...facts and absolutes are what people believe in instead of God”?
- The subjunctive mood expresses uncertainty – not what is, but what might be. It is the mood of mystery, of faith interwoven with doubt. It’s humility, deference, the opposite of excessive pride or self-confidence. When you think of life in the subjunctive mood, what

parts are threatening; what parts are freeing? When you think of faith in the indicative mood, what parts are threatening; what parts are freeing?

- Do you agree with Cindy's thesis that women may be more likely to do their believing, their living, and their ministry in the subjunctive mood?

Taking a look at the creation stories in Genesis, chapters 1-3

A quick background: Genesis contains 2 stories of creation, not one – and neither was written by the first humans. Most scholars believe that the Israelites did not write about creation until after they had experienced many highs and lows in their life with God: liberation from Egyptian slavery and oppression; wilderness wanderings; a period of conquest, military threats and deliverance; a golden age under the leadership of kings David and Solomon; unstable divided monarchies, and finally the Babylonian and Assyrian exiles. Through these experiences, the Israelites discovered that God is not a remote figure or unconcerned heavenly power, but instead one who faithfully seeks communion with them, despite their own fleeting loyalties and desperate rebellious mistakes. In many ways, God is like a loving parent, balancing the needs for judgment, punishment, forgiveness, guidance, and freedom. We see all of these elements in Genesis 1-3.

Creation story # 1 – Genesis 1:1-2:3 (7-day creation; both male and female in the divine image on day 6)

Pertinent fact: in Gen. 1:29, God tells Adam and Eve –“See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.” [there is no prohibition – all trees are fair game for eating in this narrative]

Creation story #2 – Genesis 2:4-25 (1st act of creation = Adam, then Garden with 2 special trees; prohibition to Adam only; then Eve is created)

Pertinent facts: God has provided all that Adam needs in the way of food, human companionship and unbroken fellowship with Creator and creation. However, even in Paradise there are choices and limits (Adam alone has been told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). God does not micromanage decisions; what humans choose to do makes a real difference. Yet God allows freedom to choose.

Revisiting the text - Genesis 3:1-6

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die;⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”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.

Cindy makes the following observations - the serpent engages the woman by asking a question designed to instill doubt. The mood implied in the serpent’s question is subjunctive: “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” I doubt that God said you shall not eat—don’t you? Remember that God’s prohibition was spoken to Adam alone; Eve was not yet created. What he later said to her in this regard we do not know. But the woman restates and overstates the prohibition, saying: “You shall not eat...you shall not touch [*touching was not mentioned to Adam by God*]...or you shall die.” In response to Eve and in the indicative mood, the serpent states a fact, an absolute: “You will not die. You will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Questions for discussion

- Up until this exchange between the serpent and Eve, God has been the main character in the narrative. Where is God now?
- The serpent equates knowing good and evil with being fully divine. The serpent further insinuates that “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...” God wants no equals or rivals; therefore God must be withholding critical information. If the serpent said this to you, what would your reaction be?
- What is wrong with knowing good from evil? Put another way, why might this kind of knowledge be the sole prerogative of God?
- How do doubts start? Grow and bloom? What can overcome them?

Back to the action in the text

Cindy has us reflect on that frozen moment in time when Eve, having heard the serpent's declaration "You will not die; you will be like God, knowing good and evil" – ponders what she knows about God, about the goodness of creation, and about the provisions of the Garden. Isn't it ALL good? Wait, maybe that was in the first story of creation. Weren't we allowed to eat from ALL the trees? Wait, that was in the first story too. Cindy muses, "for a split second, the woman sees the world not through the eyes of prohibition but possibility: she sees that the tree is good for food, is a delight to the eye, and is to be desired. Still, in that split second that never existed before the woman chooses to know good and evil rather than God, I imagine the woman to be the precursor of our gratitude, of our giddiness, of our glory in the garden where nothing, at first, is believed to be off-limits, where all things would seem to be available for our enjoyment—even God! As faith is delight and gratitude and astonishment in the midst of God's good creation, she is the mother of the faith, the radical curiosity, the utter amazement that leads us to exclaim, "This is extraordinary!"

Questions for discussion

- How hard is it for you to imagine a positive way to understand Eve's actions? What is alluring about a world of possibility vs a world of prohibition? Is a world of possibility an image in the subjunctive mood?
- How can Eve be characterized as "the mother of the faith?"
- If Eve doubted, causing her to act as she did, what doubts motivated her?

Back to the text

"Then she swallows, and delight is turned to dread" when Eve realizes that she has acted on errant information. The Fall is a fall into the indicative mood and into the world we choose to know through the determined lens of good and evil. It seems that as a result, humanity turns to rules and certitudes to save us, rather than a messy but more certain trust in God. Televangelists

and Christian authors, preachers, teachers and so-called authorities trade in the indicative absolutes of faith, when this story is all about human vulnerabilities. What if “the alienation from God we feel as a direct consequence of [Eve’s] Fall makes us beholden to her: the intense desire for God never satisfied, arises from our separation from God.” Then Eve becomes the handmaid, not of our quest for absolute certainty, but of our subjunctive human cries in the dark, a dark like this present darkness, and for a hand greater than our own to hold us in being. She is the handmaid of our doubts, our longings, our sighs too deep for words.

Cindy shares her own uncertainties as a Christian preacher, teacher and minister. She admits, “the longing, the doubt, the sighs too deep for words always found me climbing the steps to the pulpit with an urgency and an astonishment that is missed in others whose proclamations major in the indicative. My proclamation of the gospel in the subjunctive sent to my study the lost who had an inkling that they were not too far gone if even their minister admitted to whistling in the dark now and again.” She concludes, “I am beholden to Eve, in the first place, for the freedom fraught with human frailty and vulnerability that marks the faith I have been given by God to live and to proclaim.”

Questions for discussion

- Which kind of faith are you drawn to: one where there is absolute certainty, where no doubt enters in; or a faith that allows doubt, mystery, and uncertainty?
- Cindy describes herself as a congregational leader who owns her vulnerability and admits her doubts. What are the strengths of this kind of leadership style?
- Where do you turn when you have doubts