

February 10, 2016  
Ash Wednesday  
*I Have Sinned!*  
Genesis 3:1-7

**Opening words:** One of our basic human spiritual needs is for forgiveness. It is one of the things that draw us to Jesus. Jesus did not come into the world to be our role model. Jesus did not come into our world to be our teacher. Jesus did not come into the world to entertain us. Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins. Never forget, Jesus is our Savior. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Lent is a time to confess our sins and repent.

This is the first message in my 2016 Lenten sermon series, *I Have Sinned!* By the time we are done, this message will stand beside ten others. Some will be preached on Wednesday evenings, the rest will be preached on Sunday mornings. All of these messages will be posted on the church's website, WesternReserveUMC.com. I will send them all out electronically. If you would like a hard copy, then I will give you one. I really don't care how you receive the manuscript, the only thing that really matters is that you get the point, you are a sinner. Everyone who has gathered here this evening needs to repent, including your pastor. Having made this perfectly clear, let us look at this evening's scripture lesson, Genesis 3:1-7. Let me call this message, *I Have Sinned!*

**Genesis 3:1-7** Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

<sup>4</sup>"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.<sup>5</sup>"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

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We begin our Lenten sermon series in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Tradition tells us that Genesis, along with the other four books of the Pentateuch, was written by the great law giver, Moses. The reason the book was written was to explain the beginning of all things. The name Genesis means "birth" or "beginnings." The book itself, can be divided into two sections, prehistorical history and patriarchal history.

Our reading for this evening comes from the prehistorical section. In that section, every story explains the beginning of something. In our scripture lesson for this evening, we are told how sin entered into the world. You know the story. It began in the previous chapter.

Man was made out of the dirt from the ground and came to life when God breathed life into him. God took his new creation and placed him in the garden in the east, Eden, which means 'paradise'. It lived up to its name, filled with vegetation and wildlife. The man had ruled over the garden and had everything he needed to be happy, yet he wasn't happy. Something was still lacking, companionship. So God added the final piece to the puzzle. Taking a rib from the man as he slept, God created a woman. Man was pleased with his companion; she was the perfect helper. It looks like there is going to be a happy ending to our story, but you know the unhappy ending. The serpent, who many say is Satan himself, enters into the picture. He convinces the woman to break the one law in the garden: don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She does, and the spineless man does what Eve tells him; he eats from the tree too. There is no other way to say it, Adam and Eve sinned, and we have been paying for it ever since. Theologians call it "original sin" or "ancestral sin." There is something inside of us which causes us to sin. I don't want to offend anyone here this evening, but you are a sinner too! If the story of Adam and Eve sounds a little familiar to you, say, **"Amen!"**

Today was a big day for Nora Jean Emrich. Don't feel bad if you don't know her. She was born on Sunday afternoon at 1:30. She only weighs five pounds 12 ounces. She is our smallest and newest member of our church family. She is a fortunate little girl because she has wonderful grandparents, John and Kathy Emrich. She has wonderful parents John and Julie Emrich. She has wonderful older siblings, Jack, 4, and Lucy, 2. Today was a big day for her because she was released from the hospital and went home for the first time. On Monday night I went to the hospital to see her. It is always fun to hold a newborn. Newborns make a unique sound. I think newborns are truly miraculous. When I looked into her face, she was precious. Before I left, I prayed with the family and passed Nora back to her mother. Julie looked at me and said, "Isn't she the most precious baby you have ever seen?" I thought for a second before I responded and answered, "Yes! She is the most precious newborn I have seen today!" Nora is physically perfect, yet Nora has one spiritual flaw. It is the same flaw we all have, original sin. There is something inside of her that will lead her to sin. The next line is painful to say, and it will be painful to hear. The line is both comical and cruel: Nora is a sinner!

As difficult as it is for us to hear that truth, it is harder to admit that you are a sinner too. Sometimes, we try to disarm that statement with humor. Many have called me a sinner and laughed. Sometimes, we try to disarm that statement with excuses. That is what Adam and Eve did. Eve blamed the serpent, Adam blamed Eve. How many excuses have you created to excuse your sinful ways? Sometimes we excuse ourselves

with **words**. I hear verbal excuses all the time. I have heard a million excuses as to why people can't come to church. Why is every other activity more important than church? Sometimes we excuse ourselves by changing our **perspective**. "I can experience God on the golf course too." Sometimes we excuse ourselves with **ugly language**. They try to shock you with some ugly profanity, then hit you with the truth. They say they are just being honest. I think they are just exposing their ignorance. Sometimes we make excuses by appealing to another's **compassion**. "If you walked in my shoes, then you would understand my poor behavior." Sometimes we excuse ourselves by **blaming others**. That is exactly what Adam and Eve did. Sometimes we excuse ourselves by using past **events**. "I have a hard time holding a job because my mother never loved me." Sometimes we excuse ourselves by blaming **evil spirits**. Have you ever said, "The devil made me do it?" We are excellent at making excuses, because we work hard at our craft. Wouldn't it just be easier to admit the truth? Like Nora, you are a sinner! Lent is a time to be honest and repent!

Mike Yaconelli once told this story in *The Wittenberg Door*. He lived in a small, rural community. He said, "There are lots of cattle ranches around here, and every once in a while, a cow wanders off and gets lost . . . Ask a rancher how a cow gets lost, and chances are he will reply, 'Well, the cow starts nibbling on a tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it nibbles on a tuft of grass right next to a hole in the fence. It then sees another tuft of green grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that one and then goes on to the next tuft. The next thing you know, the cow has nibbled itself into being lost.'" Could that be your story? You have nibbled away until you are lost? This evening we begin the sacred season of Lent. Why don't you just admit the truth? You are a sinner! Isn't it time that you repented?