

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?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 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." "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman, "for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 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 and he ate it. 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.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, and he said to him, "all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Then the devil left him and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

"Repairing the Rupture"

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

Genesis 2:15-17

In the garden of Eden story, against the mighty self initiating acts of creation that the Lord had just accomplished (God formed, God breathed, God planted, God put, God made, God took, God commanded), the serpent entered and offered nothing capable of transformative intervention that could measure up to God's power. All the serpent could do was talk. All the serpent could do was re-talk in a cunning way about the things God has already spoken about. In verse one, "Did God say . . . ?" The serpent questions what God said. The second time it spoke saying, "You shall not die," the serpent contradicts what God says. The purpose of the serpent is to counter the purpose and promise of God, to take humankind out of the zone of God's faithful speech and out of the practice of trust. The serpent makes God's speech in the garden doubtful and negotiable. The wily speech of the serpent creates options for the human creature outside the options God has voiced and authorized.

Fast forward to the tempter's speech in the desert wilderness.

"If you are the Son of God . . .

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Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, all the tempter could do was seduce Jesus in a crafty way by talking. His cunning speech spoke to the survival fears of Jesus. Her manipulative words smooth-talked Jesus into considering usurping the power of God for his own advantage. The devil tried to trick Jesus into thinking that, as a created being in God's image, he knew better than his Maker about the ways of life and death. The purpose of the tempter's speech was to feed survival fears and to cause a

rupture between self and soul. In her book, 'Transfiguring Loss,' Jane Maynard wrote about Julian of Norwich's views on this rupture.

'Julian believed that our soul is made of the very substance of God. It is this part of our being that Julian referred to as our "higher" nature. At the same time, however, humans also have a "lower" nature that Julian referred to as our "sensuality." Julian used this term to describe "all of our psychology and physicality as individual human beings; our capacities for perception in sight, hearing, touch, and so on, our whole sensory consciousness and our capacity for action. In other words, sensuality refers to our existence as psychosomatic beings in a physical world . . . Our substance is the substance of being itself: our sensuality individuates us, making each of us one among many beings . . . sensuality relates to the union of consciousness with embodiment.'" The rupture within humans between substance and sensuality, between our higher and lower natures, came about through Adam's sin (loss of innocence and introjections of fear in humanity's relationship with the Creator) which Julian understood as "the greatest harm that was ever done or ever shall be, until the world ends"(p.118-119).

Hate speech is a harmful weapon in the tempters fear inducing, trust breaking arsenal of sinful talk. It is speech which attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes such as gender, ethnic origin, religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation. In law, hate speech is any speech, gesture or conduct, writing, or display which is forbidden because it may incite violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group, or because it disparages or intimates a protected individual or group. From our faith perspective, it is hurtful speech which puts down rather than affirms and promotes the worth and dignity of persons. From a spiritual perspective, it is wounding speech that causes a rupture between self and soul.

Remember the children's nursery rhyme: 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never harm me?' The rhyme was meant to persuade the child victim of name-calling to

ignore the taunt, to refrain from physical retaliation, and to remain calm and good natured. I don't know about you, but when I get called a hateful name, I am tempted to end that nursery rhyme with . . . 'So call me this and call me that, and call yourself a big fat brat.'

In his book, 'Gary Zukaz on Temptation,' the author put a positive spin on temptation. 'Behind every temptation is the same dynamic. It's easy to think of a temptation as a trap, but Gary says it's just the opposite. He says temptation is a gift. Zukaz says temptation is a compassionate gift: an opportunity to learn without creating negative consequences. Temptation is like a magnet. It brings negative things to the surface---and it allows you to do something about it. Temptation is an invitation to get to know yourself. You can think of temptation as providing you with a 'dress rehearsal.' When you're tempted you can play out in your mind what would happen if you indulge. Once you visualize what would happen if you snack on some chips, smoke a cigarette, buy those shoes, you can make a choice to resist or act out. The benefit of playing this out in your mind is that you don't create any negative consequences if you choose to resist. Only if you act on your temptation, have you created negative consequences for yourself and others.'

Currently our S.A.F.E.T.Y.net youth group is doing some dress rehearsing with hate speech. We are sharing stories about times when either ourselves or others have been put down by hurtful speech; felt threatened by fear inducing words; made invisible by ignoring silence; misjudged by preconceived attitudes; rendered powerless by institutionalized profiling. My hope is that in our dress rehearsing of hate language we will stop attacking ourselves and others with cuss words; we will learn the heart-warming speech of acceptance and tolerance; and that we will have an increase in faith in Christ Jesus as healer of the ruptures between our self and soul.

Prayer. Precious Lord, take our hand, help us through our times of trial and temptation with sacred speech that draws us nearer to the heart of God. Amen.