

Bereshit 2013

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick (September 28, 2013)

This week we are starting a new series of sermons that is going to run over the next three weeks. The series is called “Facing Your Insecurities”, and I chose to start our sermon series for this year on this topic because that’s where the Torah itself starts; right up in the very first stories of mankind we read about fear and insecurity. And I want to make it very clear up front that I think these stories are “True”. The creation stories and the Adam and Eve stories are “True.” They are not scientific fact and they are not historical fact. They are not true as history or science because they were not intended to teach history or science. Asking the Torah to teach you about science is like looking in a cookbook for the text of the Gettysburg Address. It could be a great book for teaching you how to cook, but you can only ask it to do what it was intended to do; and the Torah was intended to teach us eternal, not scientific, truths.

And here is one big eternal truth: People – good, well meaning people like you and me – spend a good part of their days, and often their lives, living in fear and feeling insecure. We all have aspects of our lives where we feel insecure and when we are tested, when someone or some situation rubs up against that soft spot, we tend to either draw inward or strike out at others, and in either case, we are pulling away from the people we care about and the world we live in. Insecurities feed our fears and keep us from living the kind of life that Gd has in mind for us. And that is the Truth that is being taught in this week’s Torah portion.

The Torah starts, in chapter 2, as you know, with the creation of the first human beings. And life is good- in fact more than good- it’s great! They have everything they need. They don’t have fancy cars, they don’t have mansions to live in – but they have enough to eat, a pretty place to live, and most importantly, they have each other. But it’s not enough. They can’t just be satisfied with what they have – no, they want more. And so when Gd tells them, you’ve got it all – it’s all for you, just don’t eat from this one special tree – well of course they can’t be happy and secure with what they have, they want what they can’t have and that becomes their fixation. And so Adam and Eve eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden. They make a mistake – a pretty big one. And while it is tempting to think that the mistake was eating of the tree, the biggest mistakes are what happens right after:

Gd calls out to the very first couple and asks, “Ayecka” “Where are you?” What do you mean, where are they? You’re Gd, and it’s not that big a place, don’t you know where they are?! No, Gd is not asking “Where are you geographically?” He can answer that for Himself. He is asking that first couple, “Where are you as a person? Where are you emotionally, psychologically, spiritually...?” Gd can’t answer that, only they can. It’s not “where are you?” It’s “Who are you?!” And what does Adam say? “I heard you Gd in the Garden and I was afraid.” The very first thing Man says to Gd is, “I am living in fear. I am insecure. I am afraid of the person I am.” And so what does Gd say? “Who told you to eat of the fruit?” And what does our insecure Adam do? He throws his wife

under the bus! And then what does Eve do? She blames the serpent. Both of them are so afraid to really answer that question, the real test of “Who Are You?”

But insecurity got the best of them and they turned on each other. Man, isn't that an eternal truth! You don't need a historical Adam and Eve to know that this is True with a capital “T”. Husbands and wives all know what we are talking about here. You get insecure because guess what, sometimes you make mistakes. And when the mistakes are pointed out, or challenged, you get defensive – either you withdraw, or you turn it around and get aggressive. This isn't kids stuff. This isn't fairy tales – this is real life. It's me and you, and our kids, and our own families, and the people we work with who are our worlds. We all have insecurities and when they are laid bare it hurts. That's why this Torah is True.

And so what would have been the right response by Adam or Eve? I'm not 100% sure, but I think it might have sounded something like this: “Yes, Gd I did defy you. I did make a mistake. I'm not happy about it. I'm not proud of it. I messed up. But I'll try better next time because I really do believe what you told me, that I am created in Your image. And so sometimes I'm going to do great, godly things, and sometimes I am going to goof up, but I am a work in progress, and with Your help I'll be a better person.”

Do you know what the most repeated commandment in all of the Torah is? It's “Do not be afraid.” Don't be afraid to live. Don't be afraid to be yourself. Don't be afraid to admit your mistakes. Don't be afraid to call out to Gd for help. Don't be afraid of life's challenges. That's the take away message I take from this story.

And I know it's not easy to face your insecurities and to work through them. Most of the rest of the Torah is filled with stories of people like Abraham and Moses who spend their lives facing their insecurities. And in each case it is Gd who reassures them that they have the ability, the capability and the power to live more courageously. And it's a struggle, but with Gd's help they prevail.

And I say the same to all of you: Every one of us has hidden insecurities and secret fears, fears and insecurities that sometimes get the best of us. And it is a struggle. But the spiritual message of our faith is that you have the power inside of you to acknowledge your challenges and address your fears. When we really believe in our hearts that we are all, every single one of us, created in the image of the divine, that there is intrinsic holiness inside of us in spite of our flaws, then we can reach out to Gd in confidence and answer Gd's question: “Ayecka?” “Where are you as a person?” Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to say: “I too am a work in progress, but with Your help and guidance I can be better.” Don't be afraid. Don't live in fear. Gd has put the power of courageous living inside of you and we here at your spiritual home can help you to find it. It is at moments like this, when your heart and soul are focused that you gain the clarity and sense of spiritual purpose you need to be brave and to persevere. You feel it now, and in this place, and that is one of the many reasons why I am glad that you have made the time in your busy life to be here with us today.