

# *Love it or List it*

A Homily Expositing Genesis 2:4b-8

By Brent Bowden

First Baptist Church of Rochester

---

Do you think God would take David's or Hillary's side? I'm not getting political here nor am I getting biblical. It's a different David and different Hillary.

I ask this question, because I think it might help us keep one particular thing in front of us this Lent. I have something I want to talk about with you and it isn't going to be easy. It's a topic full of shame and fear and awkwardness – a topic that many churches like ours never broach at all for a number of good reasons. You might as well know that I want to talk to about...sin. You didn't think I was going to get more specific than that did you?

We don't much like to talk about sin 'round these parts and I know that people point the finger in disgust at churches that don't talk a lot about sin sometimes, but there are some very good reasons to set this particular topic aside. It has at various points in Christian history become something of an obsession for the church to point of shame over personal wrongdoing becoming a primary byproduct of church involvement. Another byproduct of this obsession has been a heightened specificity of very particular behaviors that are more or less sinful than others – a kind of valuation of so called “sins” that led to the valuation of people based upon their “sinfulness.” There are some good reasons *not* to talk about sin, but I think there are some good reasons *to* talk about sin too. So I want during this Lenten season NOT to preach at you about sin, but to have a conversation about it – and not a conversation about particular sins, but about the concept in general. You see, I am heretical enough to suggest that I'm not sure God cares much about our moralistic purity as God does about our sense of justice and peace. I do however think that we corporately and individually have culpability in the current lack of justice and peace in the world. I don't think we made the world this way all on our own, I just think we participate in the systems that perpetuate it and I think the terminology of sin, repentance, penance, and forgiveness are still operable to describe these things. Ok, that's enough about that...I didn't really want to talk about sin tonight, I just think that *if* we're going to talk about sin this Lent there's one thing we need to keep in front of us while we do that.

Do you think God would take David's side or Hillary's? Here's a Lenten confession for you: I have on occasion seen the HGTV show, “Love It, or List It”. It's a show that follows a family, a real-life family who've grown tired of the home they live in and they've decided something needs to change. Now, these homes they've grown tired of, God bless 'em, I don't know that I'd be tired of them if you know what I mean. I just mean I don't think the people in the show make a living pastoring churches. Even so, something needs to change for them.

That's where David and Hillary come in. David is a real estate agent whose goal is to show the family some new homes and convince them that the change they need to make is to buy one of the homes he shows them. He does that while Hillary is working on fixing up, and I mean fixing up – as in walls down, rooms moved to other parts of the house, not-just-a-new-coat-of-paint fixing up – the home the family was getting tired of. It's a competition to see whether the family love it – that is, love what Hillary's done so much they decide to stay in the house in its new form – or list it, that is sell the house even in its shiny new form and move to a new home they'll love even more. Do you think that God would take David's side or Hillary's?

---

Note: Sermon manuscripts are written for the ear rather than the eye. If grammar or punctuation seem unconventional and the meaning unclear, try pronouncing the sentence aloud phonetically.

There are some who would say that God is on the side of David. David is the guy who is trying to convince the family that once their home has lost its luster, once it doesn't serve them in the way it once did, once its been run down a bit and isn't quite as sound and true and beautiful as it once was that the answer is to move on and leave it behind. There are some out there who think that God is, at least sometimes, the move on kind of God. They look to stories like the great flood in Genesis saying that after God had created the world in beauty and perfection and after humankind had just run amok and messed it all up that God obliterated almost all of the world and moved on. There's a problem there though, several problems with that understanding of the flood story, let me point out just one. At the end of that story God sees the impact of a worldwide flood and vows to never, ever do such a thing again. God is not, and I would argue never was, a "move on" kind of God. It is possible this Lenten season that in all of our consideration of our own lives that we will see that we've not been doing our part to make and to keep the world God's given us beautiful – it's possible we'll recognize our own participation in something that we might call "sin", but we should know that God will not move on from us.

So, God must be a Hillary fan, yes? Hillary is the person on the show who restores the home the family once loved. She works carefully to reshape the spaces into more functional spaces. Her team shores up any weaknesses in the foundation or the roof, they get it back to a sound state and then they redecorate and make it beautiful again. Hillary is the champion of redemption and God is a God of redemption we know. So God would most assuredly pick Hillary, right? Aren't the writings of the Apostle Paul full of references to the grace of God and its sufficiency to put us back together when we're not living into God's justice and peace? Isn't the very day we're moving toward on this 40 day journey, isn't Easter, isn't proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus not just about proclaiming that he got up from the grave *back then*, but also about proclaiming that resurrection is happening in all the world and in us *even right now*? Isn't God a God of resurrection, redemption? Of course God is, so this Lent season maybe we'll rediscover the ways that God is bringing us back to life, but I have to admit that I don't think God is on Hillary's side either.

I think God loves both Hillary and David, but I don't think God's going to choose sides and not just because it's a silly show. God's got another thing. You see we know that God isn't a move on kind of God, and we know that God is a God of redemption, but not Hillary's kind of redemption. You see, Hillary has to convince the family to love the house *again – after* it has been fixed up. That's not how God operates. Am I culpable in some of the mess that has become of this world of ours, yes I am? Are there things about the way we live our lives that could use a little sprucing up, sure. Is God ready and willing to do that work in us, yes absolutely! And when that work is done will God love us again? No. No. God isn't capable of loving us *again*, because God hasn't, can't, won't stop loving us even in the midst of our mess.

In a moment we will all have the opportunity to be marked in the sign of the cross with ashes – palm leaves actually, last year's Palm Sunday leaves now burned down and returned to the elements from which they arose and turned again into dust. As you receive the ashes you will hear the phrase, "Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return." It is true this is to be a reminder of our own human limitations, but there is something more in that phrase worth remembering.

Do you recall when I read a minute ago about God's creation of humankind? When God decided that God's good creation would be even better with humankind to care for it and watch over it and be in relationship with it and with God? The material chosen from which to create humankind, to create me, and you – was the dust of the earth. A wonderful, kind and helpful friend and mentor pastor of mine who has since completed his journey back to dust reminded me when he was living that God is and always has been in love with dust no matter how messy it might be.

This Lent season might involve a bit of introspection, which can be a painful process. As we consider our lives we may discover that we have some rearranging to do. We might decide that there is some element of belief or behavior that isn't as it should be. If that is the case for you in these 40 days then my prayer for you is this – that this recognition will not arise from a sense of fear or shame that you have to earn the love of God, but rather from a response to the fact that you are already a beautiful, wonderfully made child of God and that God is deeply in love with you *already*.

Amen.