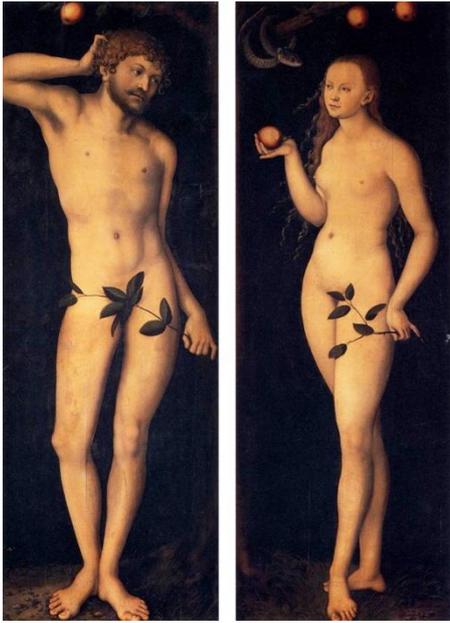


Wednesday Reflection: Apples



Three apple trees stand at the very centre of the Manse garden. In June, we had the early fall of small apples when the trees rid themselves of an overabundance of fruit. Now, the branches weighed down, hanging low, carrying hundreds of cooking and eating apples, matured by the Summer sun's heat, ready themselves to drop on to the lawn in early Autumn.

In the sensuous poetry of Song of Songs, the woman describes her young lover as, 'An apple tree among the trees of the forest....With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste'. In the Book of Psalms, the psalmist appeals to God: 'Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings'. In the Book of Proverbs, from the sayings of Solomon, we read: 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver'.

Trees at the centre of a garden and apples brings to mind the evocative mythology of the Garden of Eden. You will recall that the devious serpent tricked Eve into eating from the tree in the midst of the garden; the serpent assured her that she would not die if she ate of its fruit. Rather, eating the succulent fruit held out the promise that humanity, woman and man, would be like God, knowing good and evil. The temptation was too great: Eve did eat and so too did Adam. And the serpent was right: they did not die. It was not until Adam and Eve thought to eat from another tree, the Tree of Life, that God banished them from the Garden, placing them east of Eden. Adam lived for nine hundred and thirty years. The Tree of Life is, surely, a symbol of immortality and this creation myth accounts for our mortality.

In our Bibles, we will find no mention of apples. Over the centuries, the fruit has been variously believed to be grapes, figs, apricot, pomegranates, wheat or intoxicating wine. It was in the fourth century that the Latin scholar, Jerome, used the word *malus* in his translation of the story. In Latin, *malus* may mean evil, but it may also mean apple. The mischievous Early Church Father may have intended a good pun. From this translation or mistranslation, there is an ancient and dubious belief that the larynx in men, known as an Adam's Apple, was first caused by the forbidden fruit becoming stuck in Adam's throat as he swallowed it. That would be a very literal interpretation of the myth. In

modern day Judaism, during the New Year festival of Rosh Hashanah, apples dipped in honey are eaten as a blessing, a sweet new year.

The second tree in the Edenic Garden was the Tree of Life, the Tree of Immortality. In the Christian tradition, and perhaps for most people, religion is thought to be the pursuit of immortality. For some, the hour of death is the gateway to immortality, rising to a new, elevated, spiritual life. However, taking a different view, we may say that immortality is not a reward for a life well-lived, a compensation for suffering in this life, but rather it is an experience to be tasted now. Our union and communion with Jesus raises us to new life in this life. The Scottish mystic, the late George Matheson, said that humanity enjoyed immortality now because humanity has God within us already. Immortality is not living this life forever, but being in relationship with God, the Immortal. In Galatians, St Paul said, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me'. It is because we live and breathe the life of Christ, the breath of God already within us, that we know we are held, embraced, by God for ever. There is more to an apple tree than meets the eye.