

1st Sunday in Lent
Genesis 3:1-15
Sermon #1221
February 26, 2023
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3:1 Now the serpent was more clever than any wild animal which the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, ³ but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die.’”

4 The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die. ⁵ In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists. ⁸ They heard the voice of the LORD God, who was walking around in the garden during the cooler part of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 The LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

10 The man said, “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.”

11 God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”

12 The man said, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

13 The LORD God said to the woman, “What have you done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14 The LORD God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all the livestock, and more than every wild animal. You shall crawl on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.

Dear Friends and Fellow Redeemed,

Don't you wish you had a dollar for every time it's happened to you? We say things like that when we are in familiar situations. Maybe it's those household chores that even as are never really done, only redone: putting away clean dishes, folding another load of laundry, picking up after the kids, wiping the kitchen table clean. Don't you wish you had a dollar for every time you've carried out those tasks? Or maybe it's having that one friend or family member who considers himself an entertainer, and you wish you had a dollar for every time you've heard the same story or joke. It could be that part of your job or school life, the one that needs to be done but is pretty much the same every time, but some days you start trying to figure out how many times you have already performed it, and the thought crosses your mind: if I had a dollar for every time I've done that, I'd be a wealthy individual.

Today's reading is kind of like that, isn't it?... Don't you wish you had a dollar for every time you've been walking in a garden and a snake started talking to you? Anyone? You're not alone. Much of the world considers this reading nonsense. Maybe you are aware of how a large portion of the present-day church has found this particular account to be unbelievable. Maybe it's a myth or a legend, they say. Maybe Adam and Eve are just names that represent humanity in a symbolic way and serve to give some sort of explanation for the origins of evil in our world...but surely it didn't actually happen, at least not the way it's written. Is that our approach?

Not if we are paying attention to the rest of Scripture. Jesus speaks of Adam and Eve as real people, and these events as real history. So do all the inspired writers of the Bible, including the Apostle Paul. You heard it in our second reading, from Romans chapter 5. Jesus Christ can be the second Adam only if there was a first Adam. Jesus can't restore paradise unless Eden really existed in the first place. So as difficult as it may be to picture a world without death and sin and suffering, that's where we begin today, and by God's grace, that's where we'll end.

Look again at the opening words. ¹ **Now the serpent was more clever than any wild animal which the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"** ² **The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, ³ but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, 'You shall not**

eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die.” We aren’t told whether Eve fully realized what was at risk here. It was more than a piece of fruit that was at stake. It was mankind’s perfect relationship with God that the devil was attacking, and that made it truly a life-or-death situation. We haven’t been to the garden of Eden, but we have heard the same challenge, over and over again: “Did God really say...?” Does God really care what we do all day, every day? Is his Word reliable? What if it doesn’t make sense or we don’t agree with it? Is God’s Word really the foundation of our lives, or is it merely one more voice among the many that are giving us advice? Eve passes the first test, and the craftiness takes a bolder approach.

⁴The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die. ⁵In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists.

Where a leading question fails, a lie succeeds, and it is one we have heard often. Sin promises an upside while covering up the serious, potentially eternal downside. The lie urges us to doubt God’s love for his most beloved creatures and convinces us that God is trying to hold us down or keep us from something we might really enjoy: pleasure, possessions, popularity, and power all rise to the place in our hearts where God rightly ought to remain. Adam and Eve were convinced that what they might gain was worth it. They bought the lie, and instantly everything changed. They fell into sin, and the whole world fell with them. We don’t need to read the verses that follow our text, the words of God that spell out the curse, because we live the curse every day as those who have inherited their guilt and corruption. For us, paradise isn’t something lost; it’s something we’ve never known. As we age, our bodies break down, reminding us that each day is closer to the death that must occur as a result of sin. All around us, things fall apart more and more, as humanity and nature groan together under the curse of sin.

And if we had a dollar for every time we have fallen into sin, we'd have a whole lot of money, but it wouldn't do us any good in the end. We could buy the fanciest clothes around, but we can't cover up our shame and guilt. We could buy just about anything in the world, but we couldn't buy our way out of the curse of sin. We could each build our own castles, but we couldn't build a bridge back to a perfect relationship with God.

But what money can't buy, blood can. And as we read on, we see God's gracious response to our sin, one that makes all the difference not just in the world, but for eternity. **⁸They heard the voice of the LORD God, who was walking around in the garden during the cooler part of the day...** God himself walked into his newly corrupted creation, not just to punish, but to call his children back. Adam and Eve made excuses, but God made a promise in their presence that the curse wouldn't last forever. Presumably so that they could hear loud and clear, God declared war on the serpent.

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all the livestock, and more than every wild animal. You shall crawl on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.

It would be thousands of years of waiting, but one day God would walk on this cursed ground again. The big difference is that this time he would have to learn to walk. Through the generations God renewed the promise until his Son entered creation as the Son of Mary, born to rescue all nations from the curse.

Throughout his life, he would battle the serpent again and again, he would face the questions and give God's answer; he would hear the lies and respond with the truth. Our gospel reading reminds us that the serpent was not crafty enough to defeat our substitute, who proved his obedience from his lowly birth until his shameful death. Jesus didn't merely know the Word of God, he lived as the Word made flesh.

He didn't just remind us of the promise; he is the promise fulfilled. And he didn't just show us righteousness; he gave us righteousness when he exchanged his perfection for all of our sin. He became familiar with our situation in order to rescue us, so that we could be freed from guilt and assured of everlasting life.

Jesus crushed the serpent's head on the cross, but he didn't stop there. He descended into hell to proclaim his eternal victory, then marched out of the grave and returned to the right hand of God.

But the devil is a sore loser, so we can expect what we have come to know well. The serpent will come calling again, trying to wrestle us out of our Savior's loving arms. But he cannot overpower us. He cannot offer something greater than God has given us in Christ. He will try to convince us that we are slaves to sin, but the Son has set us free indeed. As familiar as we are with sin, thanks to Jesus we are just as familiar with forgiveness, because God's love hasn't run out yet, and in Christ it never will. When we struggle against temptation, we bear the armor he has given: faith is our shield and his Word is our sword. We are empowered in our baptism and fed with his Holy Supper. In these bodies and in this curse, the battles may rage but the war is already won.

And so, we struggle on, but not on our own. May our Lord ever remind us that we don't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. May we never seek to test our Lord and his love, but trust in his forgiveness and be moved toward obedience. May we rest in the righteousness that is ours through faith in Christ, worship the Lord our God, and serve him only, knowing that one day we will be fully free from the curse, and welcomed into paradise. In Jesus' name. Amen.