

The First Sunday in Lent

Text: Genesis 3

¹Now 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?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but 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.’” ⁴“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶When 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, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then 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. ⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” ¹¹And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” ¹²The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” ¹⁴So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” ¹⁶To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” ¹⁷To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” ²⁰Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. ²¹The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²²And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” ²³So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (NIV)

How the Devil Works; How God Saves Us

Every now and then we hear stories that seem to be pure evil. There have been stories of mass murder at a shopping mall in a Chicago suburb, in a suburban St. Louis city hall (Kirkwood is where the synodical offices of the LC-MS are), in places of work, and even in schools. I know a man who was taken by ambulance to the hospital a few weeks ago, and within a few minutes thieves broke into his home and took his valuables. Probably the worst incarnation of evil that I have heard in some time was the story of how terrorists in Iraq had planted bombs on mentally disabled women

to blow up a pet market last week.

We think of such stories and can see clearly that the devil is alive and still active today, but that is not usually how he works. He is crafty and sly. He disguises himself as an angel of light. He makes himself look like our friend when he is really out to destroy us. However, in all three of our lessons today we see how God saves us from the works of the devil through our Savior Jesus Christ.

I. How the devil works to tempt us.

We get a glimpse of it in the first temptation in the Garden of Eden. He began by placing doubt in Eve's mind with the question, "Did God really say...?" God's Word could not have been clearer. He told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree in the garden except the one in the middle, but the devil began by making God's word unsure. He works in much the same way with us. God's Commandments in the Bible are very clear. Yet, so often the devil tempts us to look for a way around them. Is God's Word really as clear as it seems? There must be some way that I can justify doing something that the Bible clearly says is wrong.

The devil's next step was to accuse God of impure motives. He told Eve, "*You will not surely die! For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" He told Eve that God just doesn't want you to be like Him. He called God a liar, but notice that there was also a half-truth to what the devil said. He told Eve that she would be like God. After she ate the fruit she would know both good and evil. There was some truth to that. Up to this point Adam and Eve had never experienced anything evil. Everything around them was good. When they disobeyed, they experienced evil for the first time. It turned out not to be a pleasant experience. The devil again tempts us in the same way. He tells us that God just doesn't want us to have any fun. There is a whole part of the world that we have never experienced. It can't really be as bad for us as what God says. He basically gets us to doubt God's goodness and love for us.

The most difficult part of temptation is that it seems good. Eve went to look at the fruit. She noticed that it was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom. Temptation always looks good. If it looked bad, we would run. It looks beautiful. It seems fun. We think that we can learn something from it. What can it do to hurt us?

The devil succeeded in getting Adam and Eve into doubting God's Word and His love for them. He got them to desire the one thing that God had forbidden. They fell into sin. Since that day, we have all been slaves to sin. None of us have been like Jesus in today's Gospel lesson. We are all sinners who have fallen for the tricks and temptations of the devil.

II. Sin brings horrible consequences.

The first is a broken relationship with God. Adam and Eve hid from God. They were ashamed of what they had done. They knew their guilt and sin. They also had a hard time confessing their sin. Their responses to God are very interesting. God asked Adam, "*Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*" Adam answered, "*The woman whom you gave to me, she gave me some fruit, and I ate it.*" Adam blamed Eve, but he especially blamed God for his sin. He told God that if He had never made the woman, this would have never happened. Eve took a little bit different

approach. Her answer was, *“The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”* In essence she said, “The devil made me do it.” Neither one of them was willing to take the consequences for their sin. They looked for someone else to blame for what they had done.

We live under that same broken relationship with God. When confronted with our sin, we can become defensive. We find excuses. We might even blame God for what we did. It is very hard to simply confess, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

Sin also breaks our relationship with each other. Adam had loved Eve with all his heart. Now he told God that it would have been better if she had never been in his life. God told Eve, *“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”* That was not a blessing for the man. Eve would still desire her husband, but no longer would he always treat her in the loving way that God originally planned. At times he would act like the boss of the house rather than to love her as himself. The very next story shows how quickly things deteriorated. Their son Cain murdered his brother Abel. Ever since that day we have seen broken relationships within our marriages and families. There is crime, murder, war, terrorism, and other horrendous things that we do to each other.

Sin also breaks our relationship with creation. Adam and Eve lived in harmony with nature. Now Eve would bear children with great pain, and Adam would eat his food by the sweat of his brow. Eventually, they and every living thing would die. We still see that consequence today. As we have seen in the past couple of months, the weather is not always paradise. We also do a lot of things to harm the world that God has given to us with the ways that we pollute it. One day, each one of our bodies will cease to breathe. Because of our sin, we will die.

III. But God has an answer for that sin.

The most striking thing in the story of the fall into sin is that God did not begin with anger or wrath. He did not tell Adam and Eve that they would be punished for what they did. He promised them a Savior. He said to the devil, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.”* This rebellion would not make the woman and the devil partners. They would remain enemies. And there would be a descendant of the woman who would crush the devil; however, in doing so, He would be mortally wounded Himself. The picture is of a descendant of the woman who stomps on the head of a snake, but while he does so, the snake bites him, and mortally wounds him.

This was the first promise of the Savior, a promise that was fulfilled in the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. In today’s Gospel lesson the devil tried as hard as he could to get Jesus to sin, but unlike any of us, the devil couldn’t get him to sin. Unlike us Jesus didn’t doubt God’s word or His love. He was completely obedient. Through His perfect obedience Jesus was ready to crush the devil’s head, but the devil also reached up and bit Him. That happened on Calvary’s cross. He was wounded for our transgression; He was pierced for our iniquities. He died in our place, but on the third day He rose from the dead. The way that God has saved us is not by power, but by taking our punishment on Himself. Jesus is the new Adam. Sin and death came by Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, but salvation and life come through Jesus obedience on Calvary.

The devil is very crafty. Far too often He leads us into temptation, but thanks be to God. He has saved us from our sins. May He give each of us that faith in Christ, that our sins will be forgiven, and we will receive the life and salvation that God has planned for us.

Amen.

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