

First Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2017

Genesis 3:1-15

The Lord Remained Faithful to His Love

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Dear friends in Christ,

Who enjoys looking back into history only to discover our ancestors' failings? It can be painful. Looking for family of noble character and notable acts, we discover less than perfection and infamous deeds. Behold our first parents, Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve are not mythical characters, or figments of some writer's imagination to make a point. They were real people God created in a perfect state who chose to disobey his commands. This brought ruin to them and to us.

Instead of trusting God's Word, Eve doubted it, believed Satan's lies, and with her husband failed to live in their God given roles. They lost the image of God. They lost free will. They lost eternal life. We have inherited their sinful nature. We pass it along to our children. That is why Holy Baptism is such a wonderful blessing for us and for Charlee. Holy Baptism creates faith in Christ and forgives our sinfulness and sin and gives us eternal life as the children of God.

Looking back on our ancestors failure is painful. At the same time, we hope in the fact that though they failed in their faithfulness to their Creator God, he did not fail them. He did not abandon them to their sin. He loved them before their Fall into sin. God still loved them after it. **The Lord Remained Faithful to His Love.** The devil seduced man to spurn God's goodness and love. The Lord God revealed the faithfulness of his love toward his fallen creatures.

The devil is a fallen angel who appeared in the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden. When he spoke to Eve, Satan twisted the Word of God to make it seem as if God's command were a burdensome restriction. God had said do not eat from only one tree. Satan asked, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden.'" Adam and Eve had been obeying God's command willingly in love; not as a burden but a pleasure. Cleverly the father of lies sowed the seed of doubt just as he tried to do with Jesus in the wilderness as we heard in our gospel lesson.

Our first mother did not take the bait at first. Eve parried Satan's insinuations. She correctly answered that she and her husband who was there with her could eat food from all the trees except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Taking that food into their hands and eating it would lead to death.

Satan became more boldfaced in his lie. The Hebrew indicates Satan actually quoted God but turned the quote into a negative. This gave such an action the complete opposite result, "Not you will surely die."

The devil falsely claimed that he knew what God really was doing with this command. It was of course the way God gave Adam and Eve to show their love for him by obeying his command. That is what love for God is obeying his commands. Satan lied and said it was because God was fearful that Adam and Eve would become equal to him in their knowledge of good and evil. They already knew the difference because they were good in the image of God not evil like the fallen angels.

The venom of Satan's lies had done its work, however. Even bought into the new morality which is immorality that claims to know better than God. It claims to be able to judge God's motives as evil toward those he has created. It denies God's absolute authority. It does not accept any absolute right and wrong in conduct.

Eve set aside God's Word. Now her thoughts were in harmony with Satan's thoughts. Now she looked at the tree not as a means to show love for God by avoiding it, but as something to desire which she thought God has wrongly withheld from her and her husband. Sin was now in her heart and the image of God lost. In the bondage of her sinful heart she took some of the fruit and ate it. She gave some to Adam "and he ate."

Adam and Eve had not remained faithful to God. As a result, we have inherited their sinful nature through our parents. We have no goodness in us. We have no free will in spiritual matters. We bear the consequences of sin in our lives including death. In spite of our parents' unfaithfulness the Lord remained faithful in his love. The Lord revealed that faithfulness to his fallen creatures.

I refer to Adam and Eve as "creatures" in the sense of the word "those who are created." God created Adam and Eve apart from the rest of creation. They did not evolve or develop from a lower form of life as the great lie of evolution claims.

To fallen Adam and Eve, the Lord revealed himself as the God of free and faithful grace. He came into the garden and sought out Adam and Eve. In what we call a theophany, the Lord appeared in human form to speak with them about what they had done. Since the perfect harmony with God was gone and sin separated them from God, Adam and Eve foolishly tried to hide. Then, they tried to blame the other for their fall. Then Eve tried to blame Satan as if she were but a helpless pawn in the whole affair. These are their legacies to us in our fallen natures; thinking we can hide from God, blame others for our sins, or blame Satan as if we did not have the power of Christ and God's Word to overcome his lies.

We have another legacy. This is the first promise of the Savior. God had spared their lives although now they would die. Now Adam and Eve would hear their Lord put a curse on Satan. The Lord said to Satan that your new friendship with mankind is over right now. God said that he was going to send the Savior, a descendant, a seed of the woman, who would destroy Satan's power. That power was ended right then and there as God's promises are complete the instant he makes them.

The apostle John among others identified Jesus as that seed. He wrote in his first epistle, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." The Son of God would endure suffering and death on the cross as Satan bruised his heel. But there Jesus Christ would crush Satan's head, destroy his power by enduring it all as our substitute. The Father raised his Son to life to show that Jesus' words on the cross were indeed true, "It is finished."

Satan knew from that first gospel that the Lord God had undone all the evil Satan had brought into the world. There would continue to be consequences of sin, pain and death, hard labor and frustration, the world subject to decay. But over that all loomed Jesus Christ's victory and our reconciliation with God.

It is painful to look back at our ancestors' fall into sin as the devil seduced them with his lies and his twisting of God's Word. He continues with the same forms of attack. It is painful when we give it to that seduction or see others fall victim. Yet towering over and above our sinful natures is that first gospel that has not changed; that gospel that saves us in Word and in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

These means of grace continue to convey God's faithfulness toward his fallen creatures that never changes. It is his promise that we are no longer separated but reconciled. And even though we must pass through death as the wages of sin, we will continue to live as the gift of God through Christ Jesus. Amen. <SDG>