

The Fall and the Christus Victor

February 26, 2023

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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We began the season of Lent on Wednesday last week. On that day, we began a 40-day journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross. Now if you count on the calendar from Ash Wednesday, February 22 to Resurrection Sunday, this year on April 9, you will count 46 days. Now that does not equal 40. How come? Well, we do not count the Sundays as part of Lent because each Sunday is like a little Easter, resurrection Sunday for us. So, not counting the Sundays there are 40 calendar days in Lent.

And I am sure it was not lost on you this morning that we heard the story of the Temptation of Jesus was during a period of 40 days in the Wilderness. His temptations by Satan occurred right after his Baptism. Was it a coincidence that the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was the Old Testament reading this morning? The star character of the TV program NCIS, Leroy Jethro Gibbs, often says there is no such thing as a coincidence. And it is the same with our readings today because the focus of our thoughts this morning is on temptation which leads to sin and its effects. And the summation of both of these stories was the point of our Epistle reading from Romans this morning.

Now, you may feel you understand all God meant you to hear in these three readings, so with your knowledge of the Word of God, you do not need to listen to God's Word this morning.

Why not go out and get a cup of coffee and a pastry? After all, you have heard it all before and what could be any different this morning? Go out and satisfy your needs and while you are at it make a few phone calls or catch up on you emails. Send a few texts. God's Word is the same today and yesterday and tomorrow. Did God say explicitly that you had to hear His Word on Sunday morning only? You can get caught during the week. You might even listen to our midweek Lenten broadcasts on the Internet or YouTube. Or take a week off from God's Word. Surely God did say you had to sit through hearing His Word when you need a nice warm cup of coffee and a nice, tasty pastry? Did He?

I'm not as adept at tempting you as Satan is. But Satan is successful with some people at this church on Sunday mornings doing just as I facetiously proposed.

Let us look at what happened in the Garden of Eden first. God created Adam, the first man, and then created Eve, the first woman, as a companion and helper for him. They were created in the image of God. They had no sin, and they were pure, blameless, and righteous in the eyes of God. They lived in an exquisitely beautiful place. They had no cares, no worries, no illnesses, no bills, no college tuition, no back-breaking labor, no demands, and no clothes. They were totally blessed by God. They were His creatures from His creation.

Satan saw them as prey. He saw them as a means to attack God and ruin the perfect world God had created. After God created Adam, his Word was inextricably clear to him. God said: "You

may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Do you notice how clear God’s Word about the tree and the consequences from eating it fruit were? Now, since Adam had never seen death, I do not know if he understood what it meant that he would die. He soon would learn. Satan knew these Words of God too. With this knowledge, Satan also knew this would be a means to destroy Adam and bring ruin to the perfect world God had created.

After Eve had been created, Satan approached her to tempt her. How would he do that? He would trick Adam and Eve into doubting the Word of God and then cause them to disobey that Word to their demise.

You may have noticed in the reading from Romans this morning that St. Paul seems to put all the blame for The Fall into sin on Adam. You may have also noticed in the Old Testament reading that it was Eve who was the first to eat the fruit, not an apple, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, Eve is not all to blame. Remember, God had told Adam not to eat the fruit of that specific tree before Eve was created. Adam was with Eve while Satan was leading her into the sin of disobeying the word of God. Adam heard the discourse between Satan and Eve. Adam heard Satan question whether God really meant what he said about eating from that particular tree. Adam heard how Satan questioned whether God really meant they would die if they ate from the tree. Adam heard Satan accuse God of being deceptive about the result of eating the fruit. Adam heard Satan accuse God of being selfish and wanting to

keep the knowledge to Himself and not share it with Adam and Eve. He heard it all. Adam was supposed to be a guardian for his wife, Eve. He should have stepped up, reminded her about the Word of God, and prevented her from eating the forbidden fruit. He did not. Instead, he joined Eve in disobedience. Most people put the blame on Eve. Adam shares equally, if not more, for being indecisive, or gullible, or foolish, or all of these. The wages of sin are death. God did not lie to Adam when He said that. The first sin was this act of disobedience to the Word of God. It was the product of temptation by Satan. Satan lied to Eve and Adam standing next to her. They both ignored the Word of God and suffered its consequences. They lost the image of God in which they were created. They had sin and death imputed upon them never to depart. They were driven from their beautiful home in Eden never to return. And they became the forbearers of sin for every generation of humans after them starting in their own family when their son, Cain, killed his brother, Abel, and ending with each of us. We call this original sin, and it is in us like cancer. It is part of our DNA, and we cannot get it out. Sin is now an inherited “gene” like the color of our hair or the proclivity to have cystic fibrosis. Except, this “gene” is in every one of us according to Psalm 51:5, which reads, “In sin did my mother conceive me” This does not mean that we were conceived illegitimately. Instead, it means that we are sinners because our mothers, and fathers, were sinners. They inherited that sinful nature from their parents, and their parents from their parents, and so on throughout the genealogical line all the way back to Adam and Eve. The birth

of a human being means that one more sinner populates the earth. Everyone is “conceived in sin.” All of us. 100%.

We imposed ashes and announced the consequences of sin: “Dust you are and to dust you shall return” on Ash Wednesday this week. We did that because we acknowledge this truth first announced by God to Adam.

Jesus is the only exception to this horrible dilemma which we humans face. He was not conceived in sin. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, one of the three persons of the Trinity. He is from God, the Son of God, who is Himself holy and pure, in other words without sin. Jesus is God who became man in human form. Jesus, as a human, is the sinless Son of God. When Satan tried his tricks and lies on Jesus, he failed. Jesus saw through them and used the Word of God to counter Satan. When Satan used distorted Words from God to entrap Jesus, Jesus saw through that ploy too.

Satan failed to do to Jesus what he had done to Adam and Eve. Satan failed to tempt Jesus into sinning. Satan failed to make Jesus unholy, impure, and unacceptable as a sacrifice for all sin. Satan failed to keep Jesus from going to the cross although he kept trying. Satan failed to stop the blood of Jesus from atoning for all the sin that began with Adam and Eve. All the sin which included all your sins and all my sins. Only Jesus, the sinless, unadulterated, Son of God could save us from eternal death spiritually. Only Jesus could be the “Lamb of God” who could take away the sin of the World through His death. Only His blood on Calvary could fulfill the Word of God and keep the

Word of God. Jesus would be tempted over and over again in the coming days. Only Jesus could resist and overcome Satan.

St. Paul summed this up. One man, Adam, caused sin to enter the world and defile all human beings in the world. Notice how many times St. Paul uses the word “one” in the eight verses of our Epistle. If you count, it is 11 times in 8 verses. One man, Adam, caused sin to be imputed on all humans. Because Adam--and Eve with him--fell to the temptation of Satan and disobeyed the Word of God, we all suffer. Sin is at the root of all the pain and suffering in this world. Sin is at the root of all the corruption of the world including the corruption of the natural world itself. Adam lost the image of God, and because of his sin, the beauty of Creation which God call “Good” is being lost too. All these, because of one man.

By contrast, Jesus was obedient. He did not fall for the temptation of Satan. As a result, he retained the image of God. He remained sinless, holy, and pure. All of our sinfulness was imputed upon Him on the cross, and because of His one act of salvation, all of the world was saved from eternal damnation. Because of the selfless act of one obedient man, all the sins fell on Him and He was abandoned by God. And, because of His selfless sacrifice, at that same time, all of His holiness, purity, and grace was imputed upon all of us. We received what He had, and He received what we have. It was an exchange, but it was not an even trade. Grace was given in exchange for disobedience. Grace was given to people who did nothing to earn it. Grace was given as a free gift by our God at the expense of His Son, Jesus. Grace was given because, “God so loved the

world” – God so loved you and me. And all we need do to receive this grace, and the justification before God which comes with it, is have faith that God has done this for us, giving us the hope of life eternal.

Do not believe that the spiritual warfare between God and Satan is ended. Look at the world around you and you will see the battles raging daily. Satan is hard at work tempting people, and people are falling for his lies and into his trap. Look at the war in our world. Look at the numerous murders. Look at the stealing and theft. Look at the violence. Look at the hate. Look at yourself. The battle rages within you and me. We still have original sin in our DNA. It works against us, with the help of Satan, to cause us to sin. Satan wants us to sin and turn from God to be his victims. And, if we try to rely on our own resources to resist Satan and our sinful selves, we will lose. To date, only Jesus has won the battle against Satan. We need to turn to Jesus, who has defeated Satan. We need to turn to the Word of God. With these, we can survive our sinful selves, Satan, and the world around us. We can be the victors. Martin Luther described what we face and how we can overcome sin and Satan in the words of his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” He wrote, “The old satanic foe has sworn to do us woe. With craft and dreadful might, he arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal. In battle he’ll engage. His might is doomed to fail. God’s judgement must prevail. One little word subdues him. God’s Word forever shall abide. The Kingdom’s ours forever.” You can expect temptation to come, but God and His Word are for us.

In these 40 days of this Lenten Season, turn your face to the cross and the one man, the second Adam, and what He did for you there. He was the only one who could give us life and save us from eternal spiritual death by His one act of obedience. Hold fast to this truth. It is the Word of God. It is the grace of God. It is your salvation from your sins by one man, Jesus, your Savior. It is the promise of God's Word for life eternal. Amen.