

**First Sunday in Lent – March 9, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

Pastor Charles Heup

Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-7, 14-15 (NIV)

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. 8) Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9) The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ... 15) The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16) And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17) but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." ... Now 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?'" 2) The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3) but 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 certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5) "For God knows that when 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 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. 7) Then 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. ... 14) So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all 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."

Friends in Christ Jesus:

In the Old Testament the Lord took great care to instruct parents to explain the meaning of the religious ceremonies which he commanded them to celebrate and observe. As an example after giving instructions to his people to observe an annual celebration of the Festival of the Passover the Lord gave this instruction; (Exodus 12:26-27 NIV) **26 And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' 27 then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'** "

Today the Lord hasn't commanded us to celebrate or observe any special religious ceremonies (except for the use of the sacraments) but in our freedom we do observe various Christian holidays and seasons of the Church year. Today is the First Sunday in Lent. If your children were to ask you, "Why is Lent so important," how would you answer? The Old Testament lesson for this morning suggests one way to answer the question. Lent is important because we made mess of the beautiful world God gave us and because Jesus came to rescue us from our sins.

Theme: Why is Lent So Important?

1. We made a mess of the beautiful world God gave us.
2. Jesus came to rescue us from our sins

You may have never thought of it this way but the story of Lent is really a Love story – the account of the Lord's great love for us. The Lord's love for human beings shows itself already in God's creation of the world as God himself explains it to us through Moses in the book of Genesis. In six normal days God called

this world and everything in it into existence through the power of his word. On the sixth day God created Adam and Eve to be the crown of his creation. They were created in his image – holy and sinless and with a perfect knowledge of his will. They were also created with the ability to think, to reason and to make choices. First God created Adam: **Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.** Then God himself created Eve to be the perfect helper and companion for Adam.

God's love for Adam and Eve was evident in the special care he took in creating them – Genesis 1:27 (NIV) **27) So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** It was also evident in the blessings he gave them.

God blessed them saying: Genesis 1:28-31 (NIV) **28) "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." 29) Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30) And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground-- everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31) God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.**

Our text for today continues the account of the creation of Adam and Eve by telling us about the special home that God created for them. **Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9) The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ... 15) The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.**

God had already created the entire world and had given Adam and Eve the command to rule over his creation. Now we are told that he provided a wonderful place for them to live. With this wonderful garden which we know as the Garden of Eden God demonstrated his special care for Adam and Eve and their needs. He showed them that they could trust him to provide for them and care for them. And he gave them an opportunity to express their joy and trust in him by forbidding them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. With this command God lovingly gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to exercise ability to make choices in their relationship with him.

The LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17) but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." God had given Adam and Eve ample evidence of his love for them, his care for them and his concern for them. He had shown himself to be a Father whom they could trust. They had no reason to think that he had withheld anything from them that was truly good.

What happened next explains how mankind made a mess of the wonderful creation that God had graciously told him to rule over. Sadly Adam and Eve failed to trust in the Lord and his blessings to them. When they were confronted by temptation they chose to listen to the tempter rather than to listen to the Lord who had created them and blessed them. By listening to the tempter they showed that they trusted him more than the Lord. They were looking for something better than they had been given. They were not content with what they had.

The serpent said to the woman. 5) "For God knows that when 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 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.

Immediately they experienced the consequences of their actions. **Then 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. ...** (Gen 2:7 NIV)

Sin had entered the world and God's perfect creation was no longer perfect. The mess that Adam and Eve made has only gotten worse with the passing of time. Their children were sinful. Their grand children were sinful. Well you get the picture – From the time of Adam until now all people are sinful including you and me. When Adam chose to listen to Eve he ruined his perfect relationship with his heavenly Father. But when he broke that relationship with the Lord he discovered that his relationship with Eve was not the same – they had lost their innocence. Now they were ashamed and sought to make coverings for themselves.

And when God came calling; they ran and hid. And when he found them and confronted them with their sin, things got even uglier. Adam blamed God for giving him the woman and the woman tried to pass the blame too. Neither was willing to admit their foolishness and lack of trust – all they could say is and I ate. But no matter what the excuse or the reason they were powerless to do anything to restore their perfect relationship with God.

Like Adam and Eve you and I often fail to trust our Lord, we are not content with what he has given to us. We want to be like God and sometimes we even act as if we are the god of our own little world. We value human friendship and companionship more than a relationship with God. We set aside his perfect ways for the sinful ways and values of this world. And when we do that we soon discover that things end up going from bad to worse.

One glance around us and our world with it's dysfunctional relationships between nations and the dysfunction that is so much a part of our communities and many families shows the terrible mess we have made of things in God's world. And that's a big part of the reason we observe Lent – it's a time of reflection on our sins and the mess we have made of this world and our lives. It's a somber season – reflected by a more subdued style of worship. It's a penitential season – one in which we come confessing our many sins and seeking the Lord's mercy.

Now not to be lost in all this is the fact that Lent is also a love story – an opportunity for us to reflect on God's love for us as evidenced by the fact that Jesus came to rescue us from our sins.

When God came to seek out Adam and Eve after they had fallen into sin – he came in love. There would be consequences for their sin. Death – spiritual, physical and eternal had entered the world. But God had a solution. His love would conquer sin, death and the devil and his grace would provide forgiveness and new life to Adam and Eve and all who trusted in his words of promise.

In the presence of Adam and Eve and Satan who had used the snake as his mouth piece God said: **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."** The seed or offspring of a woman would crush Satan's head while Satan would strike or bruise his heel. A bruised heel may be painful but it's not fatal – that same is not true of a crushed head. The seed of woman would destroy Satan and all the evil he had caused. Even death itself would be undone.

In Genesis 3:15 God gave Adam and Eve the promise of a Savior who would suffer as he defeated Satan. During the season of Lent our families have the opportunity to see God's love in action as Jesus carries

our sins to the cross where he dies the eternal death that we deserve setting us free from the curse of eternal death.

The season of Lent takes place in the spring of the year when the days are lengthening. Spring like Lent may have it's fair share of dark, dreary, gloomy days – but summer follows spring with it's green grass and bright flowers. In the same way the gloomy days of Lent are followed by the wonderful season of Easter in which we celebrate the new life which is ours through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. With his resurrection Jesus defeated physical death and by calling us to faith in him he has restored us to spiritual life. Now we look forward to spending eternal life with our Savior God.

What wondrous love we have had a chance to behold today. What wondrous love we will have a chance to ponder this Lenten season. What wondrous love we will enjoy for all eternity. May the Lord's blessings rest upon you and your family this Lenten season as you reflect on the mess caused by sin and the rescued provided by Jesus.

Amen.