

Sermon March 5, 2017 – Lent 1

Based on the Reconciliation series put on by the ABC District

What Repentance Means

Genesis 3:6

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.



Dear friends in Christ,

This is the first Sunday in Lent. And Lent is a time of repentance, of sacrifice and meditation. Many Christians around the world do observe this season, and of course here we are observing it. One of the characteristics of Lent is fasting and repentance. Fasting we know, and repentance too. But the world, well the world doesn't know much what repentance is, and as the world creeps up in our lives we slowly begin to forget what repentance is all about, also.

Back in the day, there was a show called

Happy Days. Do you remember it? I have seen only some episode myself. But one of the show's iconic characters was the Fonz, the personification of Cool.

He was a great guy, sticking up for the underdog, and this in spite of how life hadn't always treated him well. He was who the girls loved, and the guys sought to emulate him.

However, he had a major flaw—even though the show didn't present it as such. His flaw was that he was literally unable to say he was wrong. Even when he knew that he needed to, he couldn't say the word in reference to himself. The same thing happened when it came to the word sorry. His mouth just would not produce the sound necessary to allow him to say to someone else that he was sorry.

Maybe you have encountered people like this, people that can't say that they were wrong, and are never sorry.

And for them, it's not that their minds and lips can't form the words. It's just that they are unwilling to admit that they need to apologize to anyone for anything.

But, that's not all. Again, just look around the world us today and what's happening, whatever bad it is. We do ask "Why would people do such things to each other?" "Why would someone harm an innocent child?" "Why would a mom or dad walk off and leave their family?" "Why would someone blow up a building with hundreds of people in it?" Why do people cheat, say cruel things, and lie to each other...why, why, why?

Well, the answer is found in Genesis chapter 3.

Every rotten thing that happens in this world find its origin in the day that sin entered the world.

Genesis chapter 3 tells us how sin entered, how it entered and who initiated it.

Verse 1 tells us: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" The serpent of course was Satan.

And we know this from another part of the Scripture, from Revelation 12:9: "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the

deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

The scriptures tell us that Satan's pride became so great (Ez. 28:17) that he thought he could become like God and be worshiped, so he launched a failed coup in Heaven and was thrown down to earth where he is referred to in the Scriptures as the “Prince and ruler of this world.”

Luther wrote in his hymn “A Mighty fortress, “The old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe. With craft and dreadful might, he arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal. No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight whom God Himself elected.”

We are no match for the devil on our own. He is the origin of death. Eve was no match for the devil on her own. The old snake was tricky that day. He began with the question, “Did God really say...?” He challenged the Word of God, that's what he always does. The Word of God is always the battle ground, isn't it: “Did God really say?” Well, the only way we can really know what God said is if we are immersed in the Word. The only way we can fend off the trickery of the enemy is if we have internalized and memorized what God's Word says, and then when doubt is cast on what God said we will know what He said and not be deceived.

And even at that, notice what the devil did when Eve repeated what God had said, he questioned her interpretation. He suggested that the Word of God didn't mean what she thought and that it didn't apply to her. She also added to what God had said. She said that God had forbidden even touching the fruit when He didn't. Now, that isn't so bad, right? No eating the fruit, no touching the fruit...” tomato, tomeiro...” ... we do easily fall in the same problem, don't we? We lock ourselves into things God didn't say or desires for us, but think this is what God desires.

The problem is that in doing so, Eve accepted the devil's premise that God was holding out on them and was being unfair, and so she ate. Now, we have to take note that the problem here wasn't simply breaking the rules. The Law simply makes the truth of our spiritual condition evident. Look at what God cursed Adam for: listening to the voice of his wife. The problem wasn't that he had listened to his wife, God had intended them to talk to each other... she was the only other person in existence after all. The problem was that Adam took her word as more authoritative than God's.

And there is the problem. Once the devil has us focused on what we don't have, then our focus shifts from the forest of blessings that we do have in Him to the one tree that we can't have. The forest of eternal blessings in Christ is replaced with the short-sightedness of self-indulgence and self-righteousness, on earth. The serpent says to us, “Go ahead, divorce your wife and get a younger one, you deserve it. Go ahead and get all the things you want even if you can't afford it. Go ahead and step on others in pursuit of your own interests because you will never get what you want trusting God and asking for His will, go ahead and step on other humans integrity because you have the right do so. Go ahead and complain that you want stay in what you are used to because it is ease to handle, even though is not in God's grace or his word. Satan will always hold out on you and will make you believe there are no consequences; in fact you owe things to yourself, right? But remember that the law of sowing and reaping cannot be repealed.

Essentially Eve said to Adam, “Don't listen to God, you won't die, this is a good thing to do. Look, I ate some of the fruit and I'm not dead am I?” Ahhh, but she was dead, and she knew it. As they say, “Misery loves company.” And so Adam listened to her words and took the bite that doomed us all. Then God spoke the words that we hear every year on Ash

Wednesday, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken. For you are dust and to dust you will return." Suddenly they were conscious of being exposed. Actually, only then they realized that they were naked. Actually what they really were feeling, although didn't discover there and the, is that they were feeling was guilt and shame. Because of sin in our lives we all know those feelings. They are the feelings we all have when we are honest with ourselves. It is the fear that someone will uncover our secret shame, and so we often do what they did, we cover up and hide. Have you paid attention to that? If you haven't maybe it is about time to take a hard look at your life and think where you stand in relation to God and others.

But there is more, for not only they realized they were naked, but they also hid, they hid from God's presence, it's not the same anymore. They used to have God walk with them in the garden, every day. They delighted in their communion with the Heavenly Father, but not today. Today they were frightened when they heard him coming. They were frightened because they now had to face the music, and when God found them hiding in their shame behind some fig leaves He pronounced the sentence, "Because you have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'" cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you will eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you; by the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken." Gone were the easy delightful fruits of the trees. Now it would be work...the heavy work of a farmer. Now it would be the plants of the fields and the sweat of the brow. All of this is so that we remember about sin and death and look to our Lord in repentance and faith.

Friends, original sin is not a theological concept, it is the rebellion of God that has been repeated over and over since the dawn of creation...and it's wages are death. The truth is that temptation is always a con job. The payoff of sin is never what it promises to be. Look at the faces of those who are in slavery to drugs or alcohol. Look at what sin does to human life in hospitals, courtrooms and graveyards. As with Adam and Eve, sin destroys our innocence. It destroys our relationships with God, each other and even ourselves. And so we need some help don't we. We need that champion who has come to fight by our side. Because sin entered the world through a man and a tree, salvation would now also come through a man and a tree. Salvation and reconciliation would now come through God's own Son. Just as rebellion at the tree of knowledge of good and evil brought the curse of death to mankind, so obedience at the tree of Calvary would bring forgiveness and eternal salvation to all who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. And so yes, the wages of sin is death, but thanks be to God, the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

On the cross Jesus paid the penalty of death that was put on mankind in the Garden and in the end, he rendered the verdict as "Paid in full." As Jesus hung on that tree He saw the same sin of Adam and Eve being repeated over and over again and still He said, "Father forgive them." Our gracious God forgives all who repent of their sins and He does it because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross for us. "This is why I forgive you," God tells us, "This is why you need never run into the bushes and hide from Me."

Our epistle lesson today from Romans puts it this way, "The free gift is not like the trespass. For as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." The truth is, we can play the blame game like Adam and Eve, we can duck and hide, we can cover up and obfuscate...but there is one thing we cannot do. We cannot pay the price of our sin. Either we will pay for it ourselves in eternal destruction or we can look to the One who paid it for us and receive a full pardon.

Can't bring ourselves to say sorry like the Fonze? This year during Lent let's be honest with ourselves about our own sin. As we look ahead to the events of Holy Week, let's admit that it was our sin that caused Him to have to go there in the first place and take our punishment for us. Let's not get caught up in laying blame or covering up but instead recognize God's great love for us that He would send the remedy for our sin in Christ. This year, rather than looking to the sin of others, let's look to our own sin and fall down in repentance before the Lord like the tax collector...not even able to lift our eyes towards Heaven and saying, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner."

Today God's Word calls us to come clean, acknowledge our sin, repent and turn away from it . Turn away from our sin and turn to Jesus where we will find forgiveness full and free. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...amen.