



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

February 10, 2008

1st Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17, 3:1-7

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17, 3:1-7

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 130

Second Lesson: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Overcome By a Tree

In the Common Service that we use, page 15 and following, in the Proper Preface, the sentence that is spoken before the Words of Institution, the Communion part of the Liturgy, there is a phrase in there that a pastor friend of mine back in Lake City just didn't like. He said, "No one understands what that means." The Proper Preface for Lent says "It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who brought the gift of salvation to all people by his death on the tree of the cross, so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree would in turn by a tree be overcome." He never liked it. He always said "People aren't going to know what all that 'tree talk' is about." I always said "That's kind of how God inspired Paul to write in Scripture and I think our people are a little smarter than you are giving them credit for."

We look at this Word from our God and we see how Satan overcame Adam and Eve by a tree, right? But even as you and I see that, you and I, who know and love our Savior, also remember how Christ overcame by the tree of the cross. We have a former tree that is made into a cross in front of us to remind us of that truth, right? So that is always held before our eyes.

So this morning we look at the account of the fall into sin. We see the gifts God gives and there are probably more there than what you think. But then, let's see how things were overcome by a tree.

God gave gifts. Think of the gifts God gave. It's pretty evident. If you look at the back page of your Bulletin, God gave the gift of life. He formed the man. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became alive. God created man in a different way than he had created any other creature. He was also created in the image of God, and he was perfect and holy and knew God. He knew God's will completely and absolutely. He had the ability **not to** sin.

He also had the ability **to** sin. That is another one of the gifts that God gave him. God gave him the garden to work and take care of—this beautiful place to live that goes beyond what we can imagine because we can only imagine a world that is affected by the fall into sin. We are told in Romans that all creation groans in the expectation for the end of the world when the sons of God will be revealed because it has been ruined by sin.

God gave him the gift of life. God gave him the gift of this wonderful garden to take care of, but God also gave them the gift of saying, “you can eat from any tree in the garden, but don’t eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden for when you eat of it, you will surely die.”

You might say to yourself, “How is that a gift? Isn’t that what caused all the problems? If God had never given this command, Adam and Eve never would have sinned? Isn’t this the problem?” Well, if you ever as a teenager were late for curfew, when you got home did you try to say to your parents “If you wouldn’t have given me a curfew, I wouldn’t be late.” How would that fly? So saying it’s God’s fault because he gave the command is kind of silly, isn’t it? But that is what sin does to us. Since we are fallen creatures, we come up with these silly excuses and think they make sense.

This command was a way that Adam and Eve could show their love for God. Every time they walked by that tree, they could say “Lord, I love you more than anything that tree has to offer me.” This was the gift of how they could worship God. This was the gift of how they could demonstrate their love for God. This was the gift of how they could respond to God’s love and grace and blessing by obeying God.

Gifts come in all shapes and sizes. Some gifts we don’t always appreciate. A child opening that pack of new underwear doesn’t get as excited as opening a truck, right? But gifts are important and gifts are what we need at times that we don’t recognize. You and I need the ability to respond to God. We might want a different way to respond to God. We might want that cool toy to play with, but God gives us the gift that we need.

You and I have that chance to respond to God. We are going to look at some specific ways you and I can respond to God, because the fact of the matter is that just like we heard in the Second Lesson, since Adam and Eve sinned, we too are sinners. This text lays it out clearly how they did it.

They were overcome by a tree. God had given them all these blessings and here comes the devil in the form of a serpent and he gets them to believe that this fruit that comes out of this piece of wood that God had created, that God had put in the garden, that God had told them to stay away from, had more to offer them than God did. That makes absolutely no sense when you think about it right now, right? How could Satan convince them that something created was better than the Creator? It doesn’t make sense. How could God give them all of this stuff and then Satan narrows their focus onto one tree that God had said “no” and they think it’s a better thing to have that tree than to have God. Satan overcomes by a tree.

They had the ability not to sin, but they had the ability to sin, and Adam and Eve deliberately disobeyed God. It wasn’t Satan’s fault. It was their fault. They looked at that tree and all of a sudden they were led to believe that it was more important to them than God and that God was trying to keep something good from them.

You’ve read this. You’ve studied this. You’ve seen what Eve did, how she engaged the devil and how she contemplated it and then how she finally embraced that sin. But I want you to focus on Adam. Look at what Adam is doing while all this is going on. He

is supposed to be the spiritual leader in the family. He is supposed to be the one that takes care of the people in his family spiritually, and what do you see Adam doing? That's right—absolutely nothing. He stands quietly by. Maybe he shakes his head at the start and says, "Oh, Eve, you really shouldn't be doing that. This isn't going to go anywhere good." But he doesn't speak up. "Oh no, Eve, don't grab it with your hand. That's not a good idea." But he doesn't speak up. Maybe he is embracing it also. Maybe he is thinking it's a good idea, but his silence and his failure to carry out what God had commanded him to do let Satan overcome them by that tree.

Satan lies, twists and deceives yet today. We are in hand-to-hand combat with Satan. Each and every day of our lives, whether we recognize it or not, he is coming at us with everything he's got. He is coming at us with lies. He is coming at us with deceptions. He is coming up with twisting God's love into something that isn't His love. He's coming at us each and every day in each and every way. And you know where you have fallen. You know the sins you have committed. You know where you have not done what God has called you to do. You know where you have done what God has told you don't do. If we are honest with ourselves, we can see it crystal clear in vivid detail what we don't want to see. When we are honest with ourselves, our sins are much more than high definition. They are crystal clear. They are in front of us.

Here is one I think that you and I fall into at times. I think at times you and I are Adam. We stand quietly by and see someone else struggle with sin, and we don't want to get caught up in it. It's not our business. It's someone else's business. Let someone else talk. And we sit idly by and we sit on our hands and we are Adam as Satan is seeking to break that strand of cords—that cord of three—that is not easily broken. The strand of three that you and I have as a gift of God, the strand that you and I have that is our Garden of Eden, the strand of three cords that we have that God gives to us as a blessing is (1) ourselves, (2) being connected to God and (3) being connected to our fellow believers who are connected to God. And as we stick with all three of those cords intertwined as we encourage one another with the gospel, as we point one another to God's love in Christ, in those times when I as an individual or you as an individual are beginning to wonder about it or doubting because Satan is there lying with all he has, if we don't speak up, that's one cord that is broken. Then Satan has a much better chance of separating us from the cord that is God.

God has put us here to encourage one another. We are to be the voice that says, like Jesus said, "Away from me Satan! Away from him Satan! Away from her Satan!" That is what he has put us here to do, and when we don't do it, we have sinned. When we sit back and look at the consequences of someone else's sin and we shake our heads and say, "That's too bad." We have failed to be the encouragement that God has put us here for. We have sinned.

We do sin. And it hurts. But our God overcame by a tree, took every one of our sins where you and I fail to encourage, and carried them to the cross. He took them away completely and absolutely. And now, as you and I go forward in life, we know that even though we have failed him, he hasn't failed us. He has forgiven us. He has lifted us up and he promises to be with us. And that is what inspires us to go forward and encourage one another with the encouragement that we so desperately need—to speak

the gospel of God's truth to one another, to connect one another with Jesus Christ. Like I said, it's hand-to-hand combat every day, but if you and I are going to try to go into it with our own hands, we are in trouble. We need to fight hand **in** hand with the One who defeated Satan, hand **in** hand with the One who was perfect in our place, hand **in** hand with the One that we are to use to encourage each other with. As we do this, Jesus, who overcame Satan by a tree, will overcome in our lives. Not only will he forgive us, but he will help us so that we can be his voice, so that we can be his hands, so that we can be his arms, so that we can be the instruments of his love.

Can you open your hymnals now to Hymn 200? We sang a verse that is saying this exact thing. I don't know if we noticed it when we sang earlier, so what I want you to do is open it up and I want us to sing verse 3 right now.

*Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done!
One little word can fell him.*

What is the "little word"? What is the "little word" that fell Satan? Take your pick—Jesus; gospel—in either case it leads us right back to the cross, doesn't it? That's where we are forgiven. That's where we are empowered. That's where you and I will find the strength to not be Adam, but to be Christian—little Christ—and speak words of encouragement to help our brothers and sisters in Christ.