

“THE GENESIS OF THIS MESS”

Genesis 3:1-21

First Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 5, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Old Testament lesson for the First Sunday in Lent comes from Genesis, chapter 3, verses 1 through 21. It is on page 2 of the pew Bible. In this Old Testament lesson, we find the reason for all of life’s problems. But we also find God’s answer to them. Please stand as you are able for the Old Testament lesson. From Genesis 3, we begin reading at verse 1.

^{3:1} 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?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 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. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

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¹⁶To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and 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 shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

²¹And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

How did we end up in this mess?

Now, what mess am I talking about?

We certainly have a lot of them. Which one are we talking about?

All of them. This morning we’re talking about all the problems in the world.

Now that might seem like a tall order. Am I really going to stand here and explain to you the reason for every problem in the world?

Yes. And it’s not going to be that hard. It’s really quite simple. We could talk about some global or national issue, like some kind of war or a political or financial crisis. Or we could talk about some problem closer to home, like your own personal financial crisis or family problems or an addiction or a sickness or even death itself.

Pick a mess—any mess. How did we end up in this mess?

Let’s go back to the beginning. That’s what the word *genesis* means.

The first words in the Bible are, “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1). The book of Genesis is a book of beginnings. How did the world get here? What about the sun, moon, and stars? Where did

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plants, animals, and people come from? Why do we speak so many different languages? Where did pain, suffering, and evil come from? And why are snakes so creepy?

The book of Genesis answers these questions and many others. And it answers these questions in a straightforward and truthful way.

Now, Genesis doesn't really get enough credit these days.

We live in a skeptical age. It's even popular for churches to be skeptical of Genesis. But whether it makes us popular or unpopular, we have to be upfront and clear about this. We consider Genesis to be historically accurate.

When it says God created everything in six days, we believe it. When it says he created man out of the dust of the earth and woman out of man's rib, we believe that. When it says a serpent spoke to Eve and told her to do something bad, we believe that to be a real, historical event.

And these things that we might consider extra-ordinary by today's standards—we are not ignorant for believing them.

We believe God created out of nothing, because it's actually a reasonable explanation, especially when God proves himself by raising Jesus from the dead.

If God can do miracles, like raising people from the dead, why should we be skeptical of his other miracles, especially if they happen to make sense of so much in the world? And if Jesus—who claimed to be the Son of God and then proved it in his own resurrection—if he treated Genesis as historical literature, then why should we do anything else?

We believe Genesis to be historically accurate, and we have good reasons for doing so.

So we believe that Genesis 3 actually happened. And the events of the fall into sin had tragic consequences that have continued to our present day.

We mentioned that Genesis is a book of beginnings. So how did we get into this mess? How did it all begin?

When something bad happens to us, we naturally ask, *Why? Why did I get cancer? Why did my spouse die? Why did I lose my job? Why is there so much pain, suffering, evil, and death in the world? And why does it have to happen in my life?*

We want an explanation. We want answers.

Now, I can't explain why some specific tragedy happened. I can't explain why something happened to you and not someone else. We're just not given to know that. Sometimes those explanations are hidden in the secret mind of God. We just don't know.

But we also don't know the extent of everything God protects us from. Why is there so much evil in the world? Well, we could ask a different question: *Why isn't there more?* There certainly could be.

We consider it a tragedy when someone dies at forty, fifty, or maybe even seventy years old. So why do we consider that a tragedy? Simply because we're used to people living longer. If the average lifespan were only forty years, we wouldn't consider it such a tragedy when someone dies at that age. And if the average lifespan were two-hundred years, we would consider it a tragedy when someone dies at a hundred. Our definition of a tragedy is, at least partially, relative to what we're used to. If our lives were as easy as we want them to be, we would grieve over paper cuts.

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But here’s the point: we really have no idea how much evil God spares us from every single day. We look around the world, see all the evil, and ask, *How could God allow this?* But we could have a mere fraction of the evil in the world, and we would still ask the same thing. However much evil there is in the world, someone is going to blame God for it, regardless of whether or not it’s his fault.

So let’s think about this. Who brought evil into the world? Where did pain, suffering, and death begin? And how? What was the genesis of this mess? Let’s look to Genesis—the book of beginnings.

In Genesis 3 we have the beginning of everything bad. We have the beginning of sin, the beginning of suffering, and the beginning of death. We have the entrance of evil into God’s perfect creation.

God had set Adam and Eve in his perfect paradise and given as food for them every tree in the garden but one. They were to worship God by abstaining from this one tree and delighting in everything else.

But the devil came to them in the form of a serpent. And it was not just Eve whom the serpent tempted. Even though he directed his words toward her, Adam was there too (3:6). Adam was just as guilty as Eve, if not more.

So the Devil began by calling God’s Word into question. The first words out of his mouth were, “Did God actually say?” (3:1).

Then the serpent did more than simply question God’s Word. He contradicted his Word. He said, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (3:4-5).

So the devil contradicts God’s Word *and* calls God’s goodness into question. He implies that God is a liar, and not only that, but also selfish for wanting to keep this knowledge of evil for himself.

Prior to this, Adam and Eve knew only good. Evil, however, this was intriguing. What would it be like to know both good and evil? Maybe this would be *better* than just good. They didn’t know evil.

We, of course, do know evil. We are well acquainted with it. If Adam and Eve could ask our opinion, we would say, “No, please don’t eat that. You don’t want to know evil. God is very kind to protect you from it. Please obey him.” But they didn’t get to ask our opinion.

They were enticed by the prospect of knowing evil. God knew evil. How bad could it be?

The serpent tempted them by making evil look good. Adam and Eve did not *want* to become worse. They were actually tempted by the prospect of *improvement*. The idea was, if you eat of this, you will become like God. Who wouldn’t like that?

So, in direct violation of God’s commandment, they ate. And they quickly learned that the devil had deceived them by telling them something that was, technically, true. They did become like God in this one respect: they became aware of evil. This, however, was not the improvement they hoped for. It was a fall—a *big* fall—because, not only did they become aware of evil, they actually became evil.

While God may know both good and evil, he himself is purely good, and his commandments are good. To violate his commandments, then, is evil. And this is what Adam and Eve did, so

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they became what they sought to know: evil. And this condition has been passed on to all their descendants.

Because of this fall into sin, God pronounced curses on the serpent (3:14) and on the ground (3:17). Man must now work for food, and it will not be easy.

By the way, if you are ever wondering why you dislike your job, this is it. Work became labor when man fell into sin.

A few other problems are named as well. Childbirth became painful because of the fall, and conflict between husband and wife is also the direct result (3:16). These are just a few of the painful consequences.

But you may also notice that God did not specifically curse man. Whatever difficulties or curses we experience in life, were brought on by the fall. They came about because of man’s disobedience, not God’s decree.

So this, whether we like it or not, is the Bible’s explanation for all the evil in the world. This is where it came from. It may not explain why a specific tragedy happened to you and not someone else, but it does reveal the root of every problem.

If we want an answer to all the specific problems of pain, suffering, and evil in our lives, God doesn’t give us that—at least not in the form of an explanation. God does better. God’s answer is not an explanation ... but a solution.

So we ask ourselves, *What kind of answer is really best? Is it better for God to give me an explanation for every specific evil in my life, or is it better for God to come down and fix it all?* Here’s the thing: God answers the problem of evil, not just in words, but ultimately in deeds.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God did not abandon them. They hid from God (3:8), but God went searching for them (3:8-9). And he found them. He got them to confess their sin, which they did a pretty poor job of. But God had found them and begun the process of reconciliation. God promised to not leave them in their sin. And this promise is for us too, that we might not suffer forever from the effects of the fall.

At first glance, Genesis 3 looks like all bad news. But in reality, there is a tiny little part that is good news. And that tiny little piece of good news is so good that it outweighs all the bad news.

The good news comes when God is talking to the serpent (3:14-15). God pronounces a curse on the serpent, and that curse is really a blessing for all humanity. It’s kind of like when the referee calls a penalty on the other team. It’s bad news for them, but good news for you. So God throws a flag on the serpent, and it’s a game changer.

God says to that ancient serpent,

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel” (3:15).

First, God promises enmity. That is, conflict and war. He promises enmity between the serpent and the woman. And this is actually good. It means the war isn’t over. Perhaps the serpent thought he had won when he convinced Adam and Eve to rebel against their creator.

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Perhaps he thought he had stolen away the crown of God’s creation—that he had gained dominion over humanity. But this was not the case. God would not allow this to happen. The fall into sin was not the end of the war. It was merely the beginning. It may be a long and painful struggle, but the war is not over. It’s just beginning.

Then God goes on to talk about his warrior—the champion of humanity. He speaks of the battle that will ensue between the serpent and the offspring of the woman. Sometimes the word *offspring* refers to multiple descendants. But here God is speaking of one specific individual—someone who will fight as the champion for all humanity. His name is Jesus Christ, and he is the Second Adam. God says to the serpent,

“He shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

This is what happened at the cross. The devil struck the Son of God with what looked like a fatal blow when that sacred head was wounded. And for a time it was fatal. But this was not the bruise to the head it seemed to be. Instead of a finishing blow to the Son of God, it was the finishing blow to the ancient serpent, and merely a bruise to the heel of God’s champion.

The offspring of Eve triumphed by his own death, because his death atoned for the sin of the world. In his death we find victory. And in his resurrection we find the guarantee that his victory will come to us. Everything that troubles you will be overturned. That is a guarantee, sealed in Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

This is God’s answer to every problem of pain, suffering, evil, and even death. And by *answer*, I mean, not just an explanation, but a solution.

Adam’s one act of sin is the genesis of this mess. And Jesus’ one act of righteousness is the end of it. Thanks be to God, who has given us a champion. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.