

THE SEARCH FOR RECONCILIATION

Genesis 3:1-15

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

June 9, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The Old Testament lesson comes from *Genesis*, chapter 3, verses 1 through 15. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From Genesis 3, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

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."

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

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You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Andrea,

Your God has come searching for you. And he has found you. He has redeemed you through his Son Jesus Christ. In your Baptism, he has cleansed you by joining you to his Son Jesus Christ, whose blood makes full satisfaction for all your sins. And he has given his Holy Spirit, to attend to his Word, using it to strengthen and preserve you in the Christian faith. He has given you godly parents, sponsors, grandparents, and a congregation who love our Lord Jesus and love you. They will pray for you and nurture you in the truth by teaching you God's Word. Thanks be to God.

And for the rest of us,

There are two things we should learn from this text: first, the craftiness of the devil, and second, the persistence of our God to search for us, even when we hide from him and do not want to be found.

In the first seven verses we see the craftiness of the devil. His ways are much less obvious than we expect. Verse 1 says, "The serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field" (Gen. 3:1). So he does not appear the way we imagine him. In our minds we might picture some guy in red spandex with horns and a pitchfork. When I was a kid I used to watch a lot of SportsCenter. And they have these commercials where mascots from various teams visit the studio. There was one where the mascot for the New Jersey Devils visits. He's in an elevator when one of the anchors comes up and asks, "Going up?" The devil just shakes his head, and the anchor quickly backs out of the elevator. The real devil is not so obvious. Nor is he that honest. The real devil would not look like a devil at all. And if you asked him if he was going up, he would say, "Yes," because **"he is a liar and the father of lies"** (John 8:44).

He starts the temptation by saying, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (3:1). He questions the Word of God. And if he can get the woman to believe him, then he's won an easy victory. She was not actually there when God gave the command not to eat from the tree. Only Adam was there. Then God created the woman out of Adam's side, and we presume that Adam relayed the commandment to his wife. So the serpent questions the source of the command. Did God actually say it, or did you merely hear it from your husband?

We face the same temptation today when so-called "biblical scholars" attempt to discredit the biblical text. They make the baseless claim that the text has been changed over the years, or they say that the Bible is merely a human book. It's a temptation to make us reject the words of God, without realizing that we are rejecting God. If someone calls themselves a Christian, it's going to be hard to get them to outright deny God. The devil knows that. But if he can make us think that God's words are not actually God's words, then we might reject the words, but not realize we are rejecting God. Then the devil can replace the Word of God with something else, and suddenly we're rejecting God, but we don't know it.

One example is this very text. The theory of evolution contradicts the creation account in chapters one and two. And if creation did not happen the way God says it happened, then there's also no Adam and Eve, there's no fall into sin, and this very devil we read about probably isn't real. Every lie is from the devil, including the naturalistic lie that everything came from nothing through random chance. And if the devil can cast doubt on the first few chapters of Genesis, not only does he remove the truth that God created all things, but it would also remove the truth of

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his deceitful nature, our fallen nature, and the loving nature of God to search us out and reconcile us to himself. He does all this, not by casting doubt directly on God, but simply by casting doubt on the words that purport to be from God.

The woman does not fall for this temptation. When we read about the fall into sin, we might think, *I can't believe she gave in so easily*. But she did not. She lasted a lot longer than most people. She trusted that God had, indeed, given this command, even if she didn't hear it from his mouth. She didn't quote the command exactly right. She added the part about not touching it (3:3). Or maybe Adam added that part when he told her. Some commentators fault her for this, but she was just being careful. If you're not going to eat it, why touch it at all? So the devil's first attempt fails.

So he outright lies. "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). Now this is a real temptation. When we pay close attention, we might see how strong this temptation really was. The devil did not tempt her to do something bad. He did not tempt her to do something that would cause her to die. He tempted her to do something that would open her eyes and make her become like God. Of course, it was bad, and it did cause her to die. But the devil presented it as the opposite. This is like a friendly old man saying the elevator is going up, and offering you a butterscotch candy, when it's really the devil, luring her into the down elevator. He tempted her to think she would become wise, like God. Who wouldn't want that? That seems like a good thing, not just for myself, but for everyone. I mean, how much better off would we all be if I had all the wisdom of God? That seems like a justifiable excuse to eat the fruit. And so, she does. And she gave some to her husband, who was also with her. And here we see that it was not just the woman's fault. But the man was there with her too. They fell for the devil's temptation to become like God.

They did not become like God. They became less like him. They had been created in the image of God. This does not mean that they were exactly like God in every way, but in many ways they were like him. They were not the source of love, but they were loving. They were not the source of righteousness, but they were righteous. They had not existed from eternity past, so they're not as eternal as God is, but they were immortal like God and would live forever. They were not sovereign over heaven and earth, but God gave them dominion over the earth. But these attributes, which they had received from God, became corrupted. Instead of being loving, they became selfish. Instead of being righteous, they became sinful. Instead of being immortal, they began to die. And instead of exercising dominion over the earth, they became subject to many environmental dangers. The weather became life-threatening. Wild animals became deadly beasts. Microscopic bacteria and viruses became fatal dangers. And all mankind experiences the consequences of this fall. The image of God has been corrupted in all of us. We are all selfish, sinful, mortal, and subject to many dangers.

They felt the change immediately, so they hid themselves. First they made loincloths out of fig leaves. Prior to the fall, they were naked, but they were not ashamed (2:25). But when they sinned, something changed. The spiritual part of it is that they were ashamed of what they had done. They felt it in their consciences. But I think there's also a physical part of it. They felt a change in their bodies. Scholars speculate why, exactly, they made loincloths. I think it's that those parts of the body that give and nurture life suddenly felt more vulnerable. So they felt the need to protect those parts by covering them. Little kids don't experience this, but when we grow up and get closer to the age of procreation, we begin to feel the need, like the man and the

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woman, to cover ourselves. Those parts that create and nurture life feel sensitive or vulnerable, and it reminds us that human life is fragile. I think God made it this way so that we will remember how vulnerable human life is.

Then the man and the woman heard the LORD God walking in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees in the garden. I did this one time. I was probably in fifth or sixth grade. And I don't remember what, but I did something bad while my dad was at work. And we had this big garden in the backyard, so before he got home to discover what I had done, I hid in the bushes in the back of the garden. I wasn't afraid of his punishment. He was a good father, so I never feared that he would cause me harm. And I knew that his discipline would be fair. But I didn't want to disappoint him, so I was ashamed.

We all do the same thing with God, just like the man and the woman did. We hide from God. We don't want him to see who we really are. Every human being has this feeling, even atheists, who hide from God by pretending he's not real. It's shame.

Shame is different from guilt. They feel very similar. But guilt is a proper feeling, at least for a time. The Holy Spirit works guilt in our consciences so that we will know the difference between right and wrong, and that we will know that we are wrong, so that we will confess our sins and receive forgiveness. Proper guilt draws us to confession and repentance. But shame is something else. Shame is the desire to not be seen. And this is not a proper response to sin. God does not desire for us to feel shame. We should always want his face to shine upon us, because to have his face shine upon us means that he is gracious to us (Num. 6:25).

Nevertheless, because of the fall into sin, we all feel shame. We do not want to be seen. We do not want other people to see who we really are, and we especially do not want God to see who we really are. So we hide from him.

Sometimes we have the illusion that we searched for God and found him, but it's really the other way around. Scripture is very clear that no one seeks for God (Ps. 14:2-3; 53:2-3; Rom. 3:11). Before being found by God, no one seeks for him. We all hide from him. We might search for *a* god, but we never search for the *true* God until he finds us first.

We see this in the first reconciliation. God, of course, knows what happened. He sees all things. So he knew where to look, but he went searching for the man and the woman. He called to them and found them. And he drew out a confession from them. It was a really bad confession. The man blamed it on the woman, and he even blamed God for giving him that woman. And the woman blamed it on the serpent. She was a little bit more justified in her blame than the man was. But they were both guilty. They had sinned against God. They did not trust his command. They were not content with being created in his image. They wanted to rise to his level. They broke the perfect relationship they had with him. And they brought death into the world.

There's a sense in which death is simply the natural result of sin. When they sinned, they went against the order God had built into the creation. And so the order in which all things work was broken. This is death. It's the death of all creation. Things just don't work quite as perfectly as they did before the fall into sin, and everything eventually dies. It's simply the natural consequence of sin.

But God is also in control of this. It's not like he was just powerless to stop it. In another sense, death is God's sentence for sin, and in a mysterious way, also part of his remedy. God is the one who pronounced the curses upon the serpent (3:14) and the ground (3:17). He pronounced to the woman that childbirth would be painful (3:16), to the man that work would be

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painful (3:17-19), and that they would return to dust (3:19). This wasn't just something that happened as a natural result of sin, apart from God's control, but Romans 8 talks about how God subjected the creation to futility and bondage to corruption in order that he would also set it free and make it right again (Rom. 8:20-21).

And at the end of Genesis 3, God drove them out of the garden so that they could not eat from the tree of life anymore. If they did, they would still live forever (3:22). But that would not have been good, because they would have lived forever in death. So God subjected Adam and Eve to death in order that he would redeem them from death.

So when God found the man and the woman, he made a promise to restore them. He cursed the serpent (3:14). And he promised enmity, that is, warfare between the serpent and the seed of the woman. This is the first prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. God doesn't promise that the seed of the man would crush the head of the serpent, but the seed of the woman. This curse is pronounced to the serpent, but the man and the woman are there to hear it, and to them, it is the promise of their deliverance. The saying does not always hold true, but here it certainly does, that the enemy of their enemy is their friend.

The promise of the seed of the woman is a bit vague here, but it becomes clearer throughout the Old Testament, and it becomes fully revealed when the Son of God takes on human flesh as the man Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. The serpent strikes what looks like a fatal blow when Jesus is crucified. This is like the serpent striking the heel. But it is really a fatal blow to the serpent. There Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. By making atonement for sins, he took away the devil's power to accuse us of sin. The devil still exists, but his accusations are empty lies.

Jesus paid for sin and, therefore, took away the sentence of death. So he was raised from the dead, and the image of God was perfectly restored in him. And by Baptism, we are joined to his death and resurrection, so that just as he was raised from the dead, we too will be raised. And the image of God will be perfectly restored again in us.

So consider the man and the woman before the fall into sin. That is how we will be in the new creation, but it will be better. We will, once again, be loving and righteous. We will be immortal. We will have dominion. In fact, we will reign with Christ over all things (2 Tim. 2:12). But it will be even better than before the fall, because there will be no possibility for sin anymore, and we will live for all eternity knowing the depth of God's love, that he did not abandon us after the fall, but he took on human flesh to redeem us through Jesus' death and resurrection. God came searching for us, and he has reconciled us to himself through Jesus. Amen.

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