

GOD'S FAVORED ONES--CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

Genesis 1:26-27

TEXT: *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

With all our preparations for Christmas during the Advent Season, it's possible that for even the most pious Christian, the major emphasis of Advent can be overlooked. We know the Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Our children are memorizing the Christmas account and all the ancillary passages pertinent to this wonderful event. Our church has been decorated with the traditional symbols of the Christmas Season. We are planning our family Christmas celebrations and looking for deals on the toys and presents that we want to buy and give. Yes, "Jesus is the reason for the season!"

However, Advent has a more solemn theme. While we rightly emphasize our Lord's coming, first as a baby human, God incarnate, who came to die on the cross for the sin of the world, we also keep the other spiritual eye open on the promise of His Second Coming on Judgment Day as our Savior King. And we also are reminded that our Lord's Advent includes that personal coming into our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Putting this all together in one package leads us to the major theme of the Advent Season. Borrowing from John the Baptist, the Lord's forerunner, that theme is ***Repent! For the Kingdom of God is near!*** Mt 3:1

"But pastor! Isn't that the theme of the Lenten Season?" Yes. And it is the theme of the Advent Season. Repentance is a result of saving faith in Jesus. Where there is saving faith, there is repentance. So whether we prepare for Good Friday or Christmas, for the birth of the Savior or for His death and resurrection, the Christian's heart beats repentance of sin and faith in the forgiveness He won for us.

This Advent Season we are going to focus GOD'S FAVORED ONES. These are God's elect, those who know and believe that He created us in His own image, that we lost that image of God through sin, but have had it restored by His grace and favor.

It was the last day of the creation week when Scripture reveals that God saved the best for last: ***Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*** What does this mean that God created mankind ***in his own image***? The most simple and clear way that I can think of explaining what this means is by saying that God created man and woman with two things. First, a perfect knowledge of what God wants of us so that he did not have to be told what to do or not to do. And secondly, God who is love, created man and woman to have a love like His own. It was a perfect love so that while knowing what God wanted and didn't want, Adam and Eve felt no other desire but to live a perfect life.

However, this also created, as we would say, a problem. Adam and Eve were not puppets or robots who would live perfect lives with no emotion. Just as you and I who

love also desire to be loved, God's love requires a perfect love in return. Who of us have not felt the pain of loving someone who did not love us back? Someone might say, "I love my car," but it cannot love me back. Someone might say, "I love my dog," but my dog cannot love me back in the way that a wife, a child, or our parents love us back. So to solve this problem, God also created a way for Adam and Eve to demonstrate their love for Him over and above the love that they had for God. The Bible says: ***The LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** Ge 2 Now they had something to express their love to their Creator who had given them everything they could ever want or need. They could gather at that tree to say "thank you" and to worship Him in a special way. As they loved God, they loved that Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

So it is no surprise when Satan met them at that location to question God's wisdom in this. And there, listening to Satan, Eve distrusted God's goodness and wisdom. She ate the fruit and gave some to Adam who was there with her. At the moment trust failed, it was love that failed and their perfect love was gone. They had lost the image of God.

This sin had far-reaching consequences. In Genesis 5 we are told: ***When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. ... When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image...*** Ge 5 Here is revealed the fact that the original sin of Adam and Eve is inherited sin by all humanity. All souls ever conceived in the womb of a woman have inherited a sinful nature from their fathers. That's why Scripture says: ***There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...***

Yet in that same sentence Paul writes: ***...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.*** Ro 3 Here is how God restored His image in the hearts of men, women and children. He sent Jesus to live the perfect life required of all humanity and then took the sins of all humanity upon His shoulders and carried them to the cross so that His image is restored through faith in Jesus.

This is why Advent is a time of repentance for God's Elect, His Chosen Ones. What we have through faith in Jesus, what God has made us through faith in Jesus, cannot live side-by-side with the Sinful Nature, or the Old Adam. We look for our Lord's Second Coming, but my Old Adam still is afraid and still hates God. What I feel in my heart of faith and trust is what Paul confessed he also feels as a Christian: ***When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*** Then Paul's faith kicks in gear and believing that Jesus has indeed suffered, died and rose again for his justification, he declares: ***Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** Ro 7 Who can save us from this wretched conflict, this war between our body and soul? Jesus! Only Jesus. This is how repentance works in the hearts of God's people.

During Advent, we prepare for Jesus' first coming into the world, born to be our Savior. We also prepare for our Lord's Second Coming on the Last Day. In our preparations repentance stands full center in our lives both day and night. That's because

until the End of the World there will be no end to this battle between sin and righteousness, even in the Christian heart.

We see what sin did to Adam and Eve and their marriage. As soon as God confronted Adam, Adam blamed God AND his wife: *The woman you put here with me-- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.* Ge 3 To this day, the only way Christian husbands and wives can save themselves and their marriages is through repentance: confessing our sins to God and to each other, and trusting God's forgiveness in Christ, forgiving one another.

Adam and Eve saw the sad consequences of sin in the lives of their children. While Abel believed he was a sinner and so looked forward to the Advent of the Savior, his older brother, Cain, felt no need to repent of his jealousy and let it mushroom into murder. To this day Christians feel the pain of unrepented sin. For where there is no repentance there is no faith. Where there is no faith there is no hope of salvation. Souls in hell will then know that while Jesus paid for the sins of all mankind, they did not believe. They will have had their sins forgiven and paid for by Christ's blood, but they did not believe it.

Are you among God's Chosen Ones? What does the Bible say? God's Son Jesus was born into this world to be the Sacrifice for all sin and then says: Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life! That's why, even during the happy time of Advent while we prepare for Christmas, your heart is full of repentance! Therefore, you are prepared for His Second Coming! Amen