

THE BEGINNING OF THE LENTEN SEASON
FEEL THE TRUTH OF OUR CONDEMNATION -- TRUST THE TRUTH OF THE LORD'S WORD.

Genesis 3:1-15

TEXT: *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you crush his heel."*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Lent is a time that is traditionally devoted to repentance. I say, "traditionally" because some people believe and teach that a time of repentance is somewhat of a seasonal event. For example: there are those who put ashes on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. The ashes are to symbolize repentance the Old Testament people often expressed extreme sorrow by wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes. So ashes on the forehead was to symbolize extreme sorrow over one's sins.

The sad thing is that many people prance around with ashes on their foreheads, and that's it. Shouldn't they also then rush to the preaching of the Gospel so that the blood of Jesus might cleanse their guilty consciences and make them quickly wash the ashes off? Then there is the real sadness of those who prepare for Lent by celebrating Mardi Gras, which is French for "Fat Tuesday." The idea is to "eat, drink, and be merry, and throw up, for tomorrow is Lent."

What is Lent? Why does the Church spend 40 days in celebrating Lent? Today's Lesson offers us the answer. It is the account of the Fall into Sin, and the first revelation of the Gospel. It is, for intents and purposes, The Beginning of the Lenten Season.

Martin Luther correctly says from Scripture: Repentance embraces two parts: One is that we confess our sins; the other is that we believe that Christ has redeemed us. So simple to learn and recite, but so difficult to know and believe.

Nothing has changed throughout the history of humanity. The account of Adam and Eve's fall into sin is uniquely human and is identical to each and every one of us. Some people imagine that if they would have had the chance to be good in the Garden of Eden, they would have passed the test. But let us consider these things and honestly observe that what happened some 6000 years ago, is exactly the way sin, death and damnation still happens today.

There are three things to consider from the history of the Fall. First is that Satan's tactic hasn't changed. He first questions God's Word: ***He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*** Did you notice that this was the very same tactic that Satan used on Jesus when he tempted him? Satan tempts Jesus, true God, using the very same tactic: questioning God's Word. Every sin begins in the heart of those who first feel doubt and uncertainty about God's Word. God's Word is God, as in fact John tells us in the opening words of his Gospel: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** In 1 Then, 14 verses later John writes: ***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling***

among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Eve knew this but she felt something in her heart that was not there before. It was a desire to listen more to Satan's question. So the woman does something that she should not have had to do. She makes up her own law: *We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it, or you will die.'* This is significant. That the woman feels that she must add her own commandment to God's Word is called "legalism," and that is a sin. God's Word needs no help from man.

Noting this, Satan's counter is to openly contradict God's Word and teaching that to disobey God's Word is truly a hidden blessing: *You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* Our first parents both bought Satan's temptation to sin, and for them, as well as for us and the rest of the world, things would never be the same. Feeling the truth of their condemnation, they act stupidly. Stupidly they try to cover their naked bodies with fig leaves, and stupidly they try to hide from God. And stupidly, they challenge God, accusing him of sin and failure. When God confronts the man about his sin, he raises his fist to God's face and declares: *The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.* The woman blamed Satan. And the Lord turned his back on them both.

The first part of repentance is contrition, that is abject terror over the separation that sin causes between man and God. God had rejected their best arguments. They were exposed and about to be cast from God's presence, to die forever in hell. Did they love God anymore? How could they love a God who would send them to hell for eating a piece of fruit?

And so the Lenten Season for the world began. What was needed to offer any hope, to restore a fallen creation, was the intervention of a gracious God. Little did Adam and Eve know, but God hunted them down, and made them confess their sin so that what he was about to announce would impress their hearts and minds so that they would have the hope that would restore them and to be reconciled to God. The Law made them hate God, but what they were about to hear would make them love him again.

Turning his back on Adam and Eve, the Lord confronts Satan and declares: *Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will crush his heel."* The man and his wife now hear something that surpasses all understanding. They were going to have a baby! That baby would grow up to do battle with Satan. They would both be crushed, but the crushing of a heel is not the end. The crushing of Satan's head means his defeat.

I think it is a significant point to make in regard to the fact that the Lord does not say this to Adam and Eve, but proclaims this to Satan within their hearing. It is like what is said by Paul in his letter to the Romans: *...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* Ro 10 In other words, faith does not come from winning an argument with someone, or even with a well-prepared method meant to persuade another to accept Jesus. It is the simple proclamation that God was in Christ, the Descendant of Eve, reconciling the world to himself through faith in this promise. Believe it or not.

Adam and Eve believed what they had heard, and the Bible says that *Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.* Ge 3 This was a living testimony that his wife would be the mother of the Savior through whom the death and hell brought upon them by Satan would be crushed by the Savior whom God would send.

Has anything changed? For many centuries, people have heard this simple truth of God's salvation through Jesus. Some believe and are saved; others despise this truth and are damned. Is this not the message of Lent? Those who feel the crushing weight of their sin will find it lifted from their shoulders by the death and resurrection of Jesus. By the way, one of the words in the Old Testament translated as "forgive" is the same word that Adam's first son, Cain, used when God told him that he was impenitent in regard to his sin of murdering Abel. Cain told God that his sin of murder was more than what God would ever forgive. He was wrong.

During Lent, back in the days of Adam and Eve as it is today, repentance is the feel of our condemnation without God and the confidence and joy of God's promise that in Christ we are reconciled to God.

Believe God and live! Amen