

Epworth Chapel on the Green
March 5, 2017
Lent 1
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17, 25—3:7
Psalm 51:1-13
Romans 5:12-21
Matthew 4:1-11

In our Scripture readings for today, the destiny of the human race is told as the story of two “types” of men: the first man, Adam, and the *new* Adam, Jesus.

In our epistle lesson from Romans, the Apostle Paul presents a series of contrasts between the first Adam and Jesus, the *new* Adam. Paul argues that by virtue of the first Adam’s disobedience, sin and condemnation entered the world, and death came to reign over all.

But by the obedience of the *second* Adam, Jesus, all were justified, and grace came to reign for all.

What Paul describes in his letter to the Romans is the very drama that plays out in our Old Testament and Gospel lessons today.

Adam, the first man, was formed from the clay of the ground and filled with the breath of God’s own Spirit. Adam was a child of God, created in God’s own image. He was crowned with glory and given dominion over the world. He was created to worship God – to live not by bread alone but in obedience to every word that comes from the mouth of the Father.

Unfortunately, Adam put God to the test and gave in to the serpent's temptation. He refused to let his life be shaped by the God who had made him, and the consequences (both then and now) have been devastating.

Even though many centuries have passed since our first parents struggled with temptation, our lives are still very similar to theirs. One way this is so is that we live in a world that constantly entices us to be *who* we are apart from God. A world that whispers to us that we can be self-sufficient. A world that encourages us to define ourselves in isolation from the Creator who fashioned us. **A world that tries to trick us into believing that we can know *who* we are apart from knowing *whose* we are.** It's a temptation as old as Adam and Eve, as ancient as Jesus.

In our Gospel lesson, however, we see the *new* Adam, Jesus. And in his hour of temptation, Jesus prevails where Adam failed – and drives the devil away.

Anglican poet Malcolm Guite captures this in a sonnet based on our Gospel lesson today. In “All the Kingdoms of the World,” he writes:

*‘So here’s the deal and this is what you get:
The penthouse suite with world-commanding views,
The banker’s bonus and the private jet,
Control and ownership of all the news,
An “in” to that exclusive one percent,
Who know the score, who really run the show.
With interest on every penny lent
And sweeteners for cronies in the know.
A straight arrangement between me and you,
No hell below or heaven high above,*

*You just admit it, and give me my due
And wake up from this foolish dream of love...'
But Jesus laughed, 'You are not what you seem.
Love is the waking life, you are the dream.'*
(Quoted in the Lent Project, CCCA, March 4, 2017)

In a real sense, the entire narrative of Scripture is the unfolding story of the failure and disobedience of the first Adam, and the corresponding obedience of the *new Adam*.

We are captivated by this story, and even drawn into it, because it is also *our story*. And our experience of life shows us that we take our place in the narrative primarily after the pattern of the *first Adam*.

How so? Well, one scholar has stated that Adam and Eve were not so much victims of “original sin” as they were victims of “original insecurity.” By that he means that Adam and Eve forgot *whose* they were, and so they gave in to the temptation to secure their identity on their own.

I suspect the same is often also true for us. Think for a moment about the temptations you face, and the challenges that confront you in your life. The temptations you face do not come to you in the form of apples on a tree, but through a thousand subtle messages that seek to undermine your identity and invite you to forget *whose* you are.

This was what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden. The serpent tried to undermine trust in their Creator. Once they began to doubt this relationship of trust, they felt compelled to try to forge their identity on their own.

But part of the Good News of this season is the news that the grace won for us by Christ's obedience means that sin is no longer our master. The painful pattern of sin and rebellion and prideful self-sufficiency that marked the *first* Adam does not have to be the pattern of *our* lives any longer. The *new* Adam, Jesus, makes possible the fulfillment of the Psalmist's prayer this morning, where he says: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

That renewal occurs within us more and more as we continue to remember *whose* we are, and as we continue to live our lives with the realization that we are His beloved children, that our identity is not something we forge on our own, but something that is given to us by our Creator.

In your baptism God named you His beloved sons and daughters. And at the Table you receive grace to live as such. At the table you receive grace to trust in Him and His promises, so that you don't need to listen to the world when it tells you that you need to go your own way, do your own thing, forge your own identity, and attempt to live your life apart from the God who made you.

As you prepare to come to the Table this morning, ask yourself this question: In what area of my life am I being tempted to live my life on my own

terms, as if God does not exist? Where in my life is the enemy trying to erode my trust in God's goodness and faithfulness?

Bring that very temptation with you to the Table. Release it to Him.

Receive His peace, and renew your faith in His promise that you belong to *Him*.

As you do, you'll discover that the power and strength of the *new* Adam is setting you free from the pattern of the *first* Adam. And for that, we all say: Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.