

Sermon — 09/06/20

Text — Genesis 2:15-17

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And 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 from it you will certainly die.”

Theme — “Eden”

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

COVID (and the state!) continue to affect us. Due to current restrictions, the Board of Trustees at Our Savior’s has decided that we cannot hold in-person Sunday school for the present time. So, I thought this might be a good time for us to look at some of those old “Sunday school” stories from the book of Genesis. These lessons, then, will be the Sunday morning sermon texts until the week before Christmas; starting this coming Wednesday (September 9), our midweek services will focus on the Catechism. We begin today, then, with the perfect creation given to Adam and Eve — before they ruined it with their sin. (pause)

In Genesis 1, Moses relates for us God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them. In that chapter, the focus is on the “big picture” — of how all things came from nothing. And we have talked about this creation in the beginning a number of times in sermons. From nothing, God makes everything. Simply by the power of His Word. God’s transcendence and might and “other-ness” are fully displayed in this first chapter of the Bible. But then, in chapter 2, there is a subtle yet important shift. No longer is the story about a God who is far above, and over, and apart from His creation — now He is in relationship with it. And especially with His most loved creation, man: Adam and Eve.

In that second chapter, we hear of how God made Adam and, later, Eve. How He took dust, dirt, ground (“adamah” in Hebrew), fashioned a body using His own hands, and then breathed His Spirit into him, making

him alive. We hear how God put Adam in a special place — Eden — a garden of delights, filled with all good things. With every tree and plant that is good for food. With all the animals, who obeyed his every command. With a river that ran through its midst, for beauty and to water the garden. With the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” and the “Tree of Life” — which we will hear much more about next week.

As we heard in our text, God put Adam in this garden. To tend and nurture it. To care for it. To rule over it. To show his Father’s love to its creatures. In short, God gave Adam “chores” to do — like a good father assigns to his son. Not because He needed Adam’s help or labor, but for Adam’s benefit. You see, work IS good! It gives a sense of purpose, of direction, of sharing with others. It builds and develops our character. It is a primary way in which God makes us a blessing to others, reflecting His love. And Adam delighted in it all. So, too, did creation.

It was perfect. There was no sin, so there were no problems. No suffering or pain or death. No fighting among the animals. No weeds or pests in the fields. No storms or droughts or floods. No scorching heat or freezing cold. Just perfect peace and harmony. Between the plants and animals, between the animals and Adam, and between Adam and God. And yet, the perfect is not quite finished, is it?

No, after Adam names the animals he comes to realize that he (unlike them) is alone. They all have a partner and mate; he does not. And so, God causes Adam to sleep and forms Eve from a rib taken from Adam’s side. Then, He awakens Adam and presents Eve to him as his wife, his companion, his completion. God blesses them and unites them — He is the preacher who marries them! And together they share the work God had given Adam to do in Eden.

Now, as I have said before when talking about the creation of Eve, it wasn’t that God had slipped up when He created only Adam (and not Eve) in the beginning. It was not that God had not foreseen the need for a woman for man. Of course not. No, the delay in her coming was for Adam’s benefit: to teach him just how vital and necessary she was. Man is made to live in relation to others. Not just with the world and its creatures.

Not even just with God. No, we are made to live with (and for) one another. To give and do and love, for the sake of others. And we are not truly complete and whole and fulfilled until that is so.

Chapter 2 of Genesis closes with that creation of Eve, and Adam's delight in her. God has made all things. He has made them perfect. He has made Adam and put him as head and ruler over all of it. And now, now, He has made the perfect even better. THAT is the God who is our Father, just as He was to Adam and Eve. Not just the God who creates, but the God who creates in love. To share, to give, to sacrifice for His creatures — for us, His children. (pause)

Of course, all this teases and tantalizes us. We all want to know just what life was like for Adam and Eve in Eden. What did they do all day? What did they look like? What did they eat? How did they relate to the animals? What plants grew in the garden? What was the weather like? How long after their creation did they live in Eden before they sinned? Where exactly WAS the garden located?

It's kind of fun to speculate, even if the Bible does not give us definite answers to all of our questions. **What did they do all day?** Well, they worked. They tended the garden. They took care of the plants and animals. But unlike now, when work is so often frustrating and monotonous and boring, so often unrewarding and even seemingly meaningless, then work was a pure joy. It was what they WANTED to do. It was fun and exciting and satisfying. For in their work, they served God and creation — and one another. How we can learn from that attitude! God has put us here — in our “garden” for the same purpose: to work and help others, to show forth the Lord's love by what we do.

What did Adam and Eve look like? Well, the obvious answer is that they looked like us, like people. Not that they were this race or that; or that they were tall or short; or any such thing. No, it means that they were HUMAN. They had a body and soul. And yet, they WERE different from us in one very important way: they were without sin. That means they had none of the effects of sin that plague us. They were in perfect health: no near-sightedness, no bad backs or aching knees, no cancer, no COVID. And so the most beautiful

woman who ever lived was Eve; the most handsome man was Adam. They were the strongest, the wisest, the funniest, the most creative. And, even more importantly, their souls were pure and noble. Like the good angels. They loved to do their Father's will. They loved and served the other. Certainly, that too could be seen in their appearance.

Today, people all want to be more beautiful and attractive. Well, true beauty comes from the soul. And a soul that is pure — that is, one that has been freed from sin by faith in the work of Christ Jesus — makes us beautiful too.

What did Adam and Eve eat? Our text tells us that God gave them permission to eat of any tree — or other plant — in the garden. Except, of course, for the one: the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”. And He told them WHY they were not to eat of that tree: it would bring death, because to eat of it was to sin, to disobey God. Now, I don't know about you, but I would miss meat. A good steak. A tender roast. A grilled hamburger. But remember this: to eat meat means something must die. And there was no death before there was sin. So meat was impossible. Adam and Eve, then, were vegetarians. But what they DID have — any and all plant-based food — was tastier than any gourmet meal served at the fanciest restaurant, best steak-house, or smokiest BBQ joint today. And it was so because they were content with what God had given them.

Again, what a lesson for us! I have hamburger, and yet I whine because I want steak. You have a five-year old car, and complain because you want a brand new one. The next guy gripes because he wants a better job. If we REALLY want to enjoy life, we need to learn to receive whatever God gives us with thanks. An attitude — a realization — that THIS is what God has chosen for us makes everything better. Food. Possessions. Work. Everything.

How did they relate to the animals? In his Genesis commentary, Luther says that Adam and Eve would have played with lions like we play with a kitten. And his point is well-taken. They had that dominion and rule over creation because it was given them by God, but also because they used that position to serve.

Today we speak of wild animals having a “fear of man”. And with good reason. For all too often, man has treated the earth and its creatures, not as stewards and care-takers, but as cruel taskmasters. Yes, God has given us the earth to use — but not to abuse. It is HIS, not ours. We are merely His agents in taking care of it. No, we do not worship “Mother Nature” or put animal life on a level with that of human beings. But we DO care for it, knowing that we will give an account to the Lord for that stewardship. (pause)

Genesis is history. It is real and factual and true. But it is more than just that. Everything in the Bible is there to point us to Christ and His saving work. Everything. Including these first chapters of Genesis, even before sin came into the world. You see, if history becomes mere factoids and dates and such, then it is less than boring and useless — it can become burdensome and painful.

God made and gave a perfect world to Adam and Eve. These first chapters of Genesis teach us that. But we do NOT live in that world any more, do we? How and why that change came about will be our focus next week. But even without going into all of that, you know our world is not Eden. The fields have weeds and pests. The animals are often dangerous and deadly. We have storms and earthquakes, droughts and floods, extreme heat and cold. There is no harmony among creation or its creatures. Death is always lurking around the corner. Husbands and wives fail to love one another. And only hearing about what was then, without also hearing about Christ and the Gospel, only makes our lives more horrible.

But what was, will be again. That is the whole point of the Bible. What God made and gave to Adam and Eve, He also promises to us. It WILL be ours again, one day. The return of Eden. The perfection and harmony they knew. The peace and joy they had. But how?

Christ Jesus. The sin which destroyed the first Eden, the sin which we have inherited and to which we have added our own countless sins, that sin has been carried for us by our Lord Jesus. God in the flesh. God in OUR flesh, the flesh of Adam and Eve. He came down from heaven to be the perfect Man for us — the perfect Man that Adam (and Eve) — and we — failed to be. Jesus HAS kept God’s Law. He HAS perfectly loved and

served and sacrificed for creation and its creatures. He HAS paid the price — the cross and its hell — to settle the score, to defeat the devil, to conquer death, and to give us Eden and eternal life again. (pause)

It is a most curious thing: if you look at the last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22), you will see these words:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

How like the description of Eden from Genesis! And it WILL be ours. Because the Father has promised it. Because Christ has won it. Because the Holy Spirit gives it. And so, while we mourn Eden's loss, we look forward to its return, when Christ will come again. And so we cry — with Adam and Eve, and all believers throughout history: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wed — Nicene Creed
OS — Nicene Creed
FE — Offertory/Prayers