

St. John's Lutheran Church  
February 10, 2008

"A Foiled Plan"  
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

It is the First Sunday in the season of Lent, 2008. This past Wednesday the season of Lent began with the observance of Ash Wednesday. Two classic dimensions of Ash Wednesday worship are 1) an extended confession of sin and 2) the imposition of ashes upon us. As believers in Christ participate in both, there is the opportunity to acknowledge our total dependence upon God. We are dependent upon God for our salvation because we know that we are in captivity to the condition of sin. We are dependent upon God because human life is frail and we know that ultimately we are dust and to dust we shall return.

The season of Lent is part of the liturgy of the classic liturgical church in that the season of Lent is one of numerous seasons which are observed by the liturgy over the course of a 12-month period. These seasons vary in the theme that is presented in each season. Such that over the course of a 12-month period, every year, the church has opportunity to experience a broad sweep of Biblical themes important to Christian faith and life.

At the beginning of the season of Lent we have opportunity to be reminded of the sinful condition of all of humankind. And the purpose of the reminder is to point us to the Great Three Days that stand at the end of the season of Lent: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord. It is in our full awareness of our sinful condition that we are most aware of our need for the grace of God and the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first Sunday of the season of Lent carries us back to the very beginning of the Bible with a reading from the beginning of the book of Genesis. The second and third chapters of Genesis are very interesting Biblical material. The manner in which this material is to be understood has been open to debate by Biblical interpreters. There are those who believe that all of what is contained in these chapters is historical fact. That is to say that it is possible to believe that at one time there was only one man and one woman on earth. And that the man's name was Adam and that the woman's name was Eve.

And, furthermore, it is possible to believe that there once was a snake, a serpent, who could talk. And that this talking serpent was able to entice first Eve and then Adam into sin.

There are other believers, however, who interpret this material slightly differently. It is possible to take the position that these verses do not have to do with historical fact, but are rather intended to declare eternal truth about the reader and the rest of humankind. Believers who take this position take note that the Hebrew word "Adam", "Adam", actually means "man". And that the man in the story is to be representative of all men. Eve, then, is possibly representative of all women. And the story before us then becomes a story about every man and every woman, including you, dear friend in Christ, and me.

However you understand these points of interpretation, the meaning of the account before us this morning remains the same. And there is more than one point of meaning that is declared by this Biblical text. First and foremost, it is to be understood, and declared at the beginning of the season of Lent, that humankind are created to be obedient to their creator. This is the meaning when we are told that the Lord God commanded the man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God here is indicating his plan for the relationship between God and humankind. It is to be a relationship that is characterized by obedience on the part of humankind to the Lord God, the creator.

In the same way, however you may understand other points of interpretation of the verses that follow, it is furthermore to be understood that God's original plan for the relationship between himself and humankind has been foiled. The plan for the obedience of humankind has been foiled. And all of humankind find themselves in bondage to sin and disobedience and under the judgment of God.

It is not too much to say that the rest of the Bible documents what it is that God undertakes as plan B to establish himself in proper relationship with humankind. In a major way God's new plan begins to take shape in the twelfth chapter of Genesis when he chooses Abraham to be the patriarch of his people, in order that in Abraham and Abraham's descendents God might bless all the families of the earth.

And after centuries of working with the descendents of Abraham, who came to be known as the Israelites and ultimately as the Jews, it was in Jesus, first and foremost among the descendents of Abraham,

that God was finally able to bless all the families of the earth. And God was able to establish his plan of redemption that will not be foiled by the devil, the world, or the sinful nature of humankind.

The obedience that the Lord God laid out as his expectation for all humankind, according to the book of Genesis, was obedience that was accomplished to perfection by Jesus. And, for Jesus, that expectation of obedience included his suffering and death on the cross, in order that he might offer satisfaction for the disobedience of humankind. And in order that all who believe in him might, in fact, for Jesus sake, be declared guiltless in spite of the sin which holds them so closely throughout this earthly life.

The Bible says that it is in our baptisms that we are connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus in order that his sacrifice might become beneficial also for us. It is in our baptisms that Jesus' death and resurrection becomes our own death and resurrection as we die to sin and are raised to new life.

Baptism, in ancient times, was strongly connected to the meaning of Lent. In ancient times, people were baptized only once a year. The baptismal festival occurred on the Saturday evening before Easter at what was called the Easter Vigil. It seemed appropriate that new persons of faith were added to the community of faith on the most important festival of the year for the church, the celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord from the dead. Because the church was at the very beginning of its history, baptism was celebrated primarily among adults. And these adults submitted to a time of instruction and faith formation in advance of their baptisms at Easter. And this time of instruction and faith formation came to be known as the time of Lent.

So it is that it is appropriate that we, too, in our time undergo a time of renewal of faith during the season of Lent. It is appropriate that we, too, spend time in Lent reflecting upon the meaning of our baptisms and ultimately upon the meaning of Christian faith. It is appropriate that we, too, are refreshed in our understanding that we who are lost in the disobedience of sin have been saved by grace through the mercy of God that we have known in Jesus Christ. And, this morning, it is appropriate that St. John's Church should begin the season of Lent with two baptisms of our own, through which this grace of God might be fully displayed before us on this very day. Amen.