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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

First Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 9, 2014

Text: Matthew 4:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One way to organize the Bible is to consider it as the account of two Adams, the first Adam and the second Adam. The first Adam was created from the dust of the earth. God the Holy Trinity created Adam in His own image and then breathed into him the breath of life. As if these gifts weren't enough, God gave Adam his wife Eve; she was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, equal to Adam in every respect though different. Each completed the other as the Lord joined them together as husband and wife.

Satan saw the goodness of God's creation and hated it. He was a murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44) and wanted only to destroy God's work.

To accomplish this goal, Satan takes on the form of one of God's creatures, a serpent. It's an insidious type of incarnation. With the voice of a serpent, Satan begins his deadly work. "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1). Please note this people of God, Satan is a master at distorting God's Word to his own advantage. Let's see what God had actually said? Genesis 2:16–17, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Do you hear the switch, the corruption? Where God gave great freedom and liberality – every tree in the garden but one – Satan limits and begrudges – you shall not eat of any tree in the garden. God had actually said they may eat of every tree in the Garden except for one. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not the way God wanted Adam and Eve to experience His perfect creation.

Eve responds to Satan's question with God's Word plus some. And there begins humanity's trouble with reading, hearing, and applying God's Word. Listen to what she said to Satan (Gen 3:3), "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden – *so far so good, if only she had stop there* – neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" You will look in vain for that last phrase. God didn't say that. Did Adam? Or did Eve

come to that conclusion? It's hard to say. But it reveals a perennial problem we have with God's Word. We want to add to it or take from it, make it better or easier, or whatever. It reflects a lack of confidence in what God says. Whether we add or take away from God's Word, we follow the devil's temptation, "Did God really say..."

Satan has Eve right where he wants her. Her additions to God's Word sound so pious and sensible. If you don't touch it then how could you ever eat it? Right? Two can play at sounding pious with God's Word. And the Devil is a master at it. Listen to Satan's pious, sensible sounding response (Gen 3:4–5), "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Didn't God call that one tree the tree of *the knowledge* of good and evil? That fruit can't kill you. Instead, it's the path to becoming more like God and fulfilling your God-given potential. Don't you want to be like God? He gave you the task of caring for the garden. Can't you care for it better with all knowledge? Your life of devotion and obedience will only become stronger. Your eyes will be opened. And it's so easy; eat the fruit! What could be better?

Gen 3:6 describes first Eve's original sin, then Adam's, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." Notice Eve's rationalization here; it's so easy to justify sin: the fruit was practical, food; beautiful, a delight to the eyes; and it held promise, the ability to make one wise. *Don't forget that pattern of temptation!*

"And he ate" describes not only Adam's original sin but all humanity's. Paul wrote in today's epistle (Rom 5:12), "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." The rest of Scripture describes the dreadful effects of man's sin. Death entered the world, along with shame, fear, sickness, unbelief, debauchery of every sort, and so forth. Thus the tale of the first Adam.

But the Bible also describes a second Adam. This Adam was born not directly from the dust of the ground but from the virgin womb of a woman. He not only reflects God's image, He is the true, real image of God. His conception was affected by the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary. It would only be a matter of time before Satan would bring his tempting skills to bear upon this second Adam, Jesus of Nazareth. The warfare that began in the Garden of Eden would continue in the Judean wilderness (Mt 4:1). Satan vs. Adam, round two. The winner takes all.

Satan continues his wily, sneaky ways. He doesn't tempt Jesus at the beginning of His wilderness fasting. No, he waits until Jesus is at His weakest, after 40 days of no food. Hungry, weak, and alone. That's the right time. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread..." (Mt 4:3). Do you hear the same tactics used in the Garden? Satan adds to God's Word so as to create doubt. At Jesus' baptism God the Father declared from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased (Mt 3:17).

Since you are the well-pleasing, beloved Son of the Father, do something divine! Turn stones into bread. What's wrong with that? You've been fasting for 40 days. It's about time you refreshed your weary body with a little bread. Jesus responds with God's Word, "It is written (Dt. 8:3), 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" No additions or subtractions. Just God's powerful Word. Jesus basically declaring, God the Father declared me to be His Son. Changing stones to bread won't change that. His Word settles the matter.

And then there's something else. The Bible describes Jesus as coming to serve, not to be served (Mt 20:28). If Jesus would have turned stones into bread, His first miracle would have been self-serving, self-justifying. Compare that to our Lord's actual first miracle, changing water into wine, recorded in John 2. To be sure His glory was revealed to His disciples but through serving the wedding party, not Himself.

Ok. The second Adam is tougher than the first. Satan takes Jesus to pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem. The second temptation (Mt. 4:5-6), "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Satan is quoting Psalm 91:11-12 word for word. Go ahead Jesus, wouldn't that be a dazzling spectacle, a delight to the eyes?!

The problem is that Satan is quoting God's Word selectively and incompletely. The next verse, Psalm 91:13 says, "You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot." That verse talks about Satan's defeat! Crushing the serpent's head, silencing His roaring threats! Jesus counters faithfully with the Bible, "Again it is written (Dt. 6:16), 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Mt. 4:7).

One more test will do it. The devil takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Mt. 4:8–9). This, in my judgment, is Satan’s greatest temptation. Satan is offering Jesus a kingdom without a cross, without suffering and death. I’ll give you the very thing you want but so much easier. What promise!

Christianity continues to face this temptation year after year. To worship a cross-less Christ and follow a cross-less form of worship and spirituality. Easter is fun. Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, and Good Friday are drab and painful with all that taking up your cross and following Me (i.e., Jesus) through fasting, prayer, and giving to the poor and needy. The church is to make disciples of all nations through preaching, teaching, and baptizing (Mt 28:19 –20). That’s slow, arduous work. Here’s an easier, quicker way to the kingdoms of the world. Satan offers the world freely! Just worship him. No cross. No hard work of evangelism and witnessing.

Jesus answers powerfully and definitively (Mt 4:10), “Be gone, Satan! For it is written (Dt 6:13), ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” The second Adam wins!! Mt 4:11 records, “Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.”

The first Adam fell. The Second stood firm. The First Adam betrayed God and all creation. The second remained faithful. The first Adam followed the devil, his works and ways. The Second followed God and His way of death and resurrection. In Jesus, all creation is restored. Today’s epistle declares (Rom 5:17), “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” The importance of Christ’s victory cannot be exhausted. Jesus knows how to deliver you from temptation; He knows how to provide your needs of body and soul; He knows how to give you an eternal kingdom established in righteousness, joy, and peace. Through the Second Adam’s obedience, you are made righteous. Stand firm in Jesus.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.