**Genesis 3:1-15** March 5, 2017

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 1

*1Now 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’?”*

*2The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3but 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.’”*

*4“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

*6When 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. 7Then 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.*

*8Then 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. 9But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”*

*10He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”*

*11And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”*

*12The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”*

*13Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”*

*The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”*

*14So 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. 15And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Hope for the Hopeless**

Hopeless. Hopeless can mean two things, two very different things.

One, I can be in a hopeless situation. Worst major assignment I ever had was a paper with a required 1,500 pages of reading. I’m a slow reader. With one week left I still had 1,200 pages—1,200 pages of Russian history. By the last night I still had 600 pages to read and ten pages to write. For months the professor had repeatedly announced that he would absolutely refuse to accept any late submission. That last night was a frantic hopeless night.

Two, hopeless can also be, not something I feel, but something I am. If I am a hopelessly angry person, I get angry easily and often. Even after friends try to help me and lots of bad things happen, I still get angry. People will say that I am hopeless. Like a house condemned by the city council, they write me off, give up on me.

I can feel hopeless or I can be hopeless. The worst is to be both.

**I.** If you have been a Christian a while, you know the background of our reading in Genesis 3. Some have not been here so long. So we have to ask the who? what? when? where? The “when” was the beginning of the world, just after God created this world. The “where” was called the Garden of Eden. We don’t know the location now. People guess, but we just don’t know. The “who” were the first two people, Adam and Eve. God put the first two people in this “garden” in the beginning. They were perfect, sinless in thought, word and deed. It was paradise.

In the Garden of Eden God had given Adam and Eve only one rule and that rule pertained to a certain tree. In the middle of the garden full of trees was one tree that God had said they were not to eat of. It was the only rule. It was not a bad tree because God created everything good. It was a good tree. God could have given another rule like, “Don’t cross this river” or “Don’t climb that mountain”, but God gave them the rule “Don’t eat from this one tree. All the rest, you can eat.” By not eating from this one tree, Adam and Eve could show that they truly loved God. Just like you might show concern for a family member by *not* putting onions on their pizza even though you like onions, Adam and Eve could love God by *not* eating from this one tree. That’s what love is and does. Restraining our freedom is how we show love for people. Restraint of freedom is an important part of love. The one thing Adam and Eve could do to love God was to *not* eat from this one tree, just because God said so.

Here is something else God gave Adam and Eve: freedom. Freedom did not begin in 1776. It goes back to the beginning. God did not create people who had to obey. God didn’t want slaves or robots. In our teenage years we all find out the hard way that love is not love unless there is freedom. Freedom opens us to disappointment, or even worse, betrayal. Whether you agree or disagree with it, this is the way God created Adam and Eve. God created them with the freedom to love him or to not love him.

In steps the snake. This snake was not evil, but Satan possessed this snake. Satan was a spirit created by God. Originally a good spirit, Satan rebelled against God’s authority and became the great enemy. His mission was and still is to destroy God’s creation.

Satan, through the snake, plays a classic con game. He builds up Eve’s self-confidence by making himself look a little under-informed. ***“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”*** She corrects him, as she should. Notice how well Eve starts here! She does exactly what she is supposed to do, exactly what Jesus did in the Gospel reading. She goes back to God’s word. ***“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.’”***

Now some say, “Well, God didn’t say they shouldn’t touch it. You see, Eve is already messing with God’s word”—that’s what some people say. And I used to think that way until I had children. You bake a beautiful chocolate cake, homemade chocolate frosting and sprinkles. And you tell your ten-year old, “Don’t eat the cake!” Half an hour later you come downstairs and the 10 year old hasn’t even licked the frosting, but she has cut a piece, served it up on a plate, and, fork in hand is sitting at the table smelling the chocolate aroma. Are you happy? But she didn’t eat any cake! When Eve said that she wasn’t supposed to touch the fruit, I think she was perfectly in line with God’s will, even if it was a little different from what he said—it’s what he meant.

So Eve went back to the source, to God and what God said. Excellent reply Eve! Eve corrected Satan. But by letting Eve be right, Satan has given her a self-confidence. And he senses it. So he gets her into a conversation that Eve should have stopped. He does not tell her to eat the fruit. He does not hand the fruit to her. But he makes her question God’s truthfulness and motives. ***“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.”*** Here is a quote I wish I could take credit for, but can’t, “What Satan has said is a half-truth, but a total lie” (*The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol.2, p.57). That’s one Christians should remember. “Satan speaks half-truths, but total lies.”

This is how Satan and the world tempt us. Generally they do not tell us to go out and do outrageous things. Instead, they tell us that those things really aren’t so outrageous. “Cursing, filling your mind with sinful images, drugs and excessive alcohol – it’s really not all that bad. Those are rules made up by grouchy people who don’t want you to have fun.” That’s how the world tempts us. That’s how Satan tempted Eve.

Then Eve made the fatal mistake. Instead of taking her stand on God’s word, she applies her own opinions to the matter. ***“The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom…”*** Physically strengthening (you know, if I don’t eat, I could die!), aesthetically pleasing (just looking at it makes me feel good!), psychologically rewarding (how can you know until you try?!). God had obviously been untruthful and selfish. ***“She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”***

What sin can you not justify in this way? I can take the most obvious sins in the world and make them reasonable. I can swear – because that’s how everyone else talks. I can be lazy – because it’s just too hard for me to be hard-working. I can be a gossip – because how else is anyone going to know? I can murder – because life doesn’t begin at conception but at birth. I can condone homosexuality – because that’s just the way people are born. I can dishonor authority – because they abuse their authority. If I listen to Satan whispering in my ear, there is no sin I cannot justify. God’s Word is crystal clear on each and every one of these issues. But when I start applying my human mind to it, indeed, ***“The fruit [is] good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom…”***

As soon as we step away from the clear words of God, and start using our own judgment, we have made a fatal mistake.

The only way that we can be safe in temptation—notice I did not say safe *from* temptation because you will never be free *from* temptation, not even Jesus was free *from* temptation—the only way that we can be safe in times of temptation is to respond to every temptation with God’s word—as Eve did that first time, and as Jesus did every time. God says, “Do! and Don’t!” That is where our discussion needs to start and end. When we respond with God’s Word it is not us, but God’s Holy Spirit answering. As soon as we lay this weapon down, we are in a hopeless situation.

**II.** If you want to know why this world sometimes seems a hopeless mess, read verses 6-13. It’s shocking.

The first thing that Adam and Eve notice, after they sin, is that they are naked. This can be a mildly embarrassing Bible verse. But it tells us something very important that we often miss. When Adam and Eve sinned man’s relationship within himself is broken. They had been completely content with who they were. They were perfect, created in God’s image, sinless. They were happy with that. But at the instant of sin, they felt shame. The connections within themselves were short-circuiting.

Quickly Adam and Eve found that another relationship was destroyed. God the Creator was a father who wanted to walk with his children. But now they were afraid. They had betrayed his trust. He would find out. He would be displeased. So they hid. What had been a perfectly happy relationship now became adversarial. And to this day it is so.

God confronted Adam with his sin (and there is a lot to be said about men and women in the fact that God came to Adam even though Eve had first eaten). And did you hear what Adam said? ***“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree.”*** First he blames God, and then millennia before Greyhound existed, he throws Eve under the bus. The perfect harmony of the first marriage and all marriages and all interpersonal relations was shattered.

When the Lord goes to Eve, she does no better. She has no one left to blame except the snake and so makes the original dog-ate-my-homework excuse, ***“The serpent deceived me.”*** And man’s relationship with the created order is smashed.

The first sin was terrible. But when God gave an opportunity to repent, Adam and Eve kept on smashing the china until not a piece was left in the house, in a vain hope to save their skins. They destroyed their internal relationship, their relationship with God, with each other, with the world.

Not only had they made a hopeless situation, they had proven that they were hopeless people!

**III.** It was to these hopeless people in a hopeless situation that Genesis 3:15 was spoken. And before I read this first promise of a Savior, I want you pause and think about that. They had broken the only rule they had. When an opportunity to make it right arose, they refused to admit they had sinned and went about blaming anything and everything they could. To these people who completely failed to move the needle off zero, to these people who had nothing good left in them, and who were proving it to new measures with each passing second, for them God said, ***“[Satan,] I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”***

One would come to crush Satan’s power and heal what he had unleashed. Adam and Eve could not do it. But the seed of the woman, one born of a virgin, the Promised One, he would come and destroy what Satan had wrought in the Garden of Eden. The long trek to Calvary had begun.

Jesus would destroy Satan’s power. He would say “No” to every temptation. He would fulfill every law. He would pay the price for the sin. He would do what Adam and Eve, and you and I could never hope to do.

To us children of Adam and Eve, children who walk in our parents sinful footsteps every day, to us has been given the news that they could only long to see. Jesus Christ is the Mighty One who has crushed Satan and delivered from the curse of sin through faith in him. Love him who is not ashamed to love children of hopeless people in a hopeless situation. He is our hope. Amen.