**Romans 5:12-19** March 1, 2020

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

*Romans 5:12Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—13for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 14Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.*

*15But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*

*18Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 19For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

**Two Names Everyone Should Know—But One Especially**

Dear Friends in Christ,

**#1 on the Influential Person List**

Who’s the most influential person in the world? Not so many years ago, more than a few people would have said Michael Jackson or Princess Diana. Sure, we laugh. Popular people often get confused with influential people. Those are not really *influential* people. Oh, maybe for the moment, but not in lasting ways. I freely admit: those people will be remembered far longer than I, but mention them fifty years from now and people will say, “Who?”

Influential people? How about scientists? Right now Edward Jenner is looking like a hero. Over 200 years ago he developed the first immunization. In the shadow of Covid 19 (coronavirus) we say, “Way to go, Mr. Jenner!”

Politicians? Presidents, congressmen, judges all decide things that impact your day to day life: the car you drive, the food you eat.

Conquerors? These are real world changers. Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Genghis Khan, changed the futures of wide swaths of humanity.

More influential yet are religious figures: Mohammed, Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth. Not only did they shape the lives of billions, but billions willingly shape their lives according to them.

About 25 years ago, D. James Kennedy wrote a book, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?* His point was that Jesus is the most enduringly influential person ever. Do you know who got rid of slavery? Contrary to the narrative many spin, it was Christians. They didn’t just happen to be Christian, but they got rid of slavery because they were Christian. Where does universal primary education come from? Christianity. Dr. Kennedy goes on for two hundred and fifty pages about Jesus’ influence in the world.

But what if eventually there are more Muslims than Christians in the world? What if atheistic countries become wealthier and more technologically advanced than nominally Christian countries? Does that mean Jesus falls a few notches on the influential person chart? If that’s how you measure Christ’s influence—then yes! You see the problem?

Now I know a bit about Dr. Kennedy’s ministry. Dr. Kennedy never short-changed Christ’s work as Savior. But many people do. They wrap up the greatness of Jesus with the greatness of a Christian nation, or Christianity’s positive influences.

The Apostle Paul never got confused about that. The New Testament never does. It never portrays Jesus’ primary influence in worldly ways. If Jesus were all about literacy, health, and human rights, do you know how many people would be in heaven? Zero. Think about that. Jesus’ influence is greater than any worldly considerations. Thank God you know that!

**#2 on the Influential Person List**

But I have one more question for you: If Jesus is the most influential person in history, who is *second*? I say with great confidence that the second place finisher has profoundly influenced every single person ever. This person has shaped every day of your life. Who? Here’s one hint: I have never seen this person on a top ten list of the most influential people. Here’s another: the answer is in our reading.

***“Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”*** Who is the #2 world changer? Adam. He did something that stamps every single human life with the deep indelible marks of sin and death. If not for him, war would not exist, immunizations would not be necessary, you would have never attended a funeral. Our lives are the way they are because of Adam.

That is what our first reading was about. We heard about the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. The two of them had one rule and they broke it. But it wasn’t just a bad choice; a catastrophe happened.

Remember the line from a Christmas song, “chestnuts roasting by the open fire…”? Perhaps you have thought of it as one of those quaint traditions of long ago. The reason no one roasts chestnuts before an open fire anymore is that in 1904 in the state of New York, a disease, a blight, was spotted. Somehow it had made the journey from Asia. It spread like wildfire. Nothing could stop it. Within 40 years, every wild chestnut tree in North America was dead. Once the blight got in, nothing could be done.

With Adam, an infection entered the human race that will never be expunged until the end of time. ***“As sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”*** It wasn’t the fruit of a lifetime of research or decades of conquest that made Adam influential. It was a single moment that can never be undone.

All the tears of this world come down to Adam and Eve’s choice. Which makes virtually every Christian who has ever lived ask, “Why did God have to make that forbidden tree?” Sometimes the question is asked innocently enough. But too often, we ask that question to pin the blame on God. “Didn’t he know someone would eat that fruit sooner or later? It’s his fault!”

But the fault isn’t God’s. Verse 14 goes on, ***“Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.”*** What is Paul saying? Okay. Here we have Adam at the beginning of time. Then Paul introduces Moses. Moses lived thousands of years later. God gave the command about the tree to Adam. Through Moses, God gave the Ten Commandments to all humanity. It almost sounds like Paul is saying that between Adam and Moses people didn’t actually sin, because there was no written Law. ***“Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.”*** What he is saying is that between Adam and Moses people did not have outright commands direct from God that they disobeyed. They didn’t apparently have laws like “Don’t eat from that tree… Do not covet… Honor your father and mother…”, at least not like Adam and we do. But even they were sinful, and his proof is, “They died.” Everyone is sinful. Whether you have a law or not, you know better. You know how that works: you are unkind to someone, but you can always justify it, “There’s no law that says I can’t do that.” But you know the truth. Adam may have been the first to sin, but we have continued the tradition handsomely. One of our hymns puts it in a way that sounds almost funny if it weren’t so serious, “In Adam we have all been one, One huge rebellious man; We all have fled that evening voice That sought us as we ran” (CW 396:1).

**Adam and Jesus: Similar, but Not**

This Adam who has profoundly and negatively affected our lives, our father whose footsteps we continue to follow—verse 14 has something puzzling to say about him: ***“Adam… was a pattern of the one to come.”*** The “one to come” is Jesus. But how could Adam be a pattern of Jesus? I thought they were opposites. In the Old Testament reading, Adam and Eve listen to Satan, but in the Gospel reading Jesus does not. Adam and Eve ruin the world, Jesus is saving the world. How can they be the same?

Indeed! Verse 14 says there is a striking similarity between Adam and Jesus. But Paul almost seems to walk that back in the next paragraph where he points out that they are different.

It’s like someone says, “Apples and oranges are similar.” And then she goes on, “Apples are grown in cool climates; oranges are grown in the tropics. Apples are red; oranges are, well, orange.” And you start thinking to yourself, “You said they are similar but all you are telling me is how different they are.” Finally, she says, “Apples and oranges are both fruit.” They’re not the same, but have a similarity.

Verse 14 says, ***“Adam… was a pattern of the one to come”*** When the next three verses then say how they are different, the Holy Spirit is wanting us to understand what the point of comparison is, and what it is not.

***“…If the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification…”*** and on it goes.

Adam is different because his influence is determined by law, Jesus’ influence is determined by grace, God’s undeserved favor. Adam’s influence is condemnation. Jesus’ influence is justification, a clearing of all charges against us. The result of Adam’s failure is deserved. The results of Christ’s obedience are completely undeserved. Adam leads to the pessimism of doom; Christ brings the exuberance of new life.

This leads us to see clearly what the emphasis of our Christian life must be. If our primary Christian emphasis is holy living, we stand with Adam, not Christ. This is the Lutheran difference. Our primary Christian emphasis is Christ’s forgiveness.

Right now, I am reading a once best-selling Christian book that is still much read twenty years later. It has some good things to say about living a pure Christian life. However, I am on page 66 and I have not yet heard about Jesus my Savior. (Arterburn, Stoeker: *Every Man’s Battle*) The co-authors speak often of life under the law, but never about the Gospel. It’s like they have forgotten about Jesus our Savior and can only focus on trying to make up for Adam. They reduce Jesus to a life coach. They would surely name Jesus as the most influential person in the world, but if the book is a reflection of their faith, it is for the wrong reasons. In the 66 pages I have read, and judging by the table of contents in this Christian best-seller, they never address what to do when you fail to live to God’s standards. To them, the purpose for a pure life is Pharisaic obedience and the blessings you will achieve in your life. They never mention our thankfulness to God as the reason for following God’s will. Their only response to people who fall off the wagon is, “Try harder!” They never escort people to their Savior.

Christians, be careful of podcasts, of books, of preachers, of religious shows like these who, perhaps without even realizing it, misunderstand why Jesus is important.

**Adam and Jesus: Similar, but Jesus is Better**

We’ve heard the differences between Adam and Jesus, listen to the point of similarity in the last verse: ***“Consequently… just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”***

How comforting! As many as are the people corrupted by the sin of that second most influential man in world history, Adam, so many are those who have been justified by the most influential man in world history, Christ Jesus.

No Christian who knows Jesus as his or her Savior has any right to stand on the knife-edge and wonder, “Am I forgiven?” In our daily warfare against sin—which admittedly is not always successful—we are to know that our justification, the clearing of all charges against us, has been done by Jesus. Every time the believer asks, “Have I sinned too much? Have I contributed enough? Have I tried hard enough?” all those questions are unworthy of the love of God the Father, and the sufferings and death of God the Son. Can you look at the cross and ask, “Is it sufficient?” Can you walk with Jesus through his life of perfect obedience and then suggest, “Jesus, I don’t think that was enough.”

No. ***“Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*** That is your victorious certainty. Amen.