

Changed Agents

Fitchburg Nazarene Church

March 01, 2020

by

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(These are the Pastor's notes. He may have said more which is not noted here. He could have ignored certain portions of these notes in our actual service.)

As we approached Lent this year, I have been asking the Lord for His direction for us in our worship services. As a result, we will do something new – or at least, something I've only rarely done as long as I've been your pastor – We will use **The Common Lectionary** to guide us through the Lenten Season. This instrument has guided the spiritual life of the Church for centuries, using four passages of scripture for each day of the year (Sunday's included): an *Old*

Testament passage, a *Psalm*, a *Gospel*, and an *Epistle* or passage from the Book of *Revelation*.

As many of you know, the purpose of **Lent** is **to prepare the believer for Easter through the means of:**

- Prayer
- doing penance
- mortifying the flesh (fasting, abstinence)
- repentance of sins
- almsgiving, and
- self-denial.

Lent is traditionally described as lasting for 40 days, **in commemoration** of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, which Matthew, Mark and Luke all noted as happening just before Jesus began his public

ministry. During this time of temptation, Satan subjected Jesus to great temptations, which the scriptures note, He was victorious over.

Jesus was not only victorious over temptation during that 40 day period, but throughout the entirety of His life here. This is why He is our great example – our elder brother, as it were; and it is why we can relate to Him, and He to us.

Hebrews 4:15 notes:

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

For the first of our Lectionary Readings we turn this morning to...

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, “*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.*”

^{3:1}Now 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 certainly die,”* the serpent said to the woman. ⁵*“For God knows that when you eat from 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.

Prayer

*Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today.
Amen.*

Commentary

Background: *Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It begins with two versions of the creation story, neither of them intended to be scientific, but instead explaining to us, the reason why we are here on earth.*

*In the story of Adam and Eve, it tells us that we are responsible, **under God**, for the care of all creation. It then continues with the stories of the patriarchs: Abraham (who enters into a covenant (or treaty) with God), Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.*

Our reading is excerpts from an epic tale about the creation of humanity, beginning from after the creation of “*the heavens and the earth*” (2:4), a time when the earth was semi-arid, or dry. Although there were waters in and under the earth, there was insufficient irrigation for cultivation; as yet there was no rain and “*no one to till the ground*” (2:5).

At that time, God formed human (in **Hebrew**: adam) “*from the dust of the ground*” (2:7) and gave him his spirit of life. God put ‘adam’ in Eden (2:8), his earthly

domain, to cultivate and care for it. God tells him he may eat the fruit of the trees there, **except for two:**

- that of “*the knowledge of good and evil*” (**2:17**), of complete knowledge and understanding (or of moral choice); and

- that of “*life*” (**2:9**, 3:3), of eternal life, of becoming divine.

If he does eat the forbidden fruit, he will “*die*”, i.e. be separated from God.

God provides ‘**adam**’ (**humanity**) with an equal “**partner**” (**2:18**) of human’s flesh.

Thus, the tale explains sex, of “Man” (2:23, Hebrew: *ish*) and “Woman” (*isha*).

At this point, the couple do not see shame in nudity, for their relationship to God is guiltless.

Now the snake, a mischievous creature, (also a character in other ancient epics) appears. He sows doubt in the woman's mind about what God has commanded, and she responds inaccurately when she adds "*nor shall you touch it*" (**3:3**).

The snake suggests that God is trying to fool her: rather than dying, she will attain mastery of knowledge, and become divine ("*like God*", **3:5**).

She finds this irresistible; she eats of its fruit and gives some to the man. Nudity is now embarrassing, for the couple has lost its

innocent trusting relationship with God
(**3:10**).

In 3:8-19 God metes out punishment for disobeying his order:

- **to the snake:** it will lack legs and eat dust;
- **to the woman:** (a) despite the great pain of child-bearing, she will seek to bear more children; (b) (in an ancient society) man “shall rule over you”;
- **to the man:** (a) cultivation will be laborious; (b) he will die, returning to “dust”; and
- **to all three:** humans and snakes will be enemies.

Thus, our author explains some basic facts of life.

- **Snakes have no legs**
- **Women have great pain in child birth**
- **Men eat by the sweat of their brow**
- **People and snakes are enemies**

But sin has not changed God's intent: Eve is "mother of all living" (**3:20**) and God protects the couple by making "garments" (**3:21**) for them.

To protect them from exceeding human limitations and becoming like gods, he expels them from Eden, into the ordinary world.

Reflection

If the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden were a play, which character would you most like to portray, and why? Possible roles: Adam, Eve, the Snake, and God.

Well, I'm sorry, but those roles have all been handed out in this play already. We are Adam (humanity).

Not only that: we are 'fallen' humanity. Sin within the ranks resulted in our species being sinfully "bent" from day one of our individual lives.

I know that there are a great number of adults who refuse to believe that, but nonetheless, we are bent to seeking to have

our own way – to be the ‘god’ of our lives – right from the very beginning.

Some of that serves us well. **Every parent** – even if they’ve never held a baby before – will respond to the cry of their infant who “insists” on being fed, held, and cleaned up!

But it doesn’t take more than two or three years before we begin to realize that **what they really want** is to be king – queen – to be ‘god’ of this world.

That yearning and all that emanates from it, we come to call, *sin*.

The apostle Paul explains for us in Romans, just how that ‘law of sin’ came about.

Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned - ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man's

trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Commentary

Background: *Romans is the first epistle in the New Testament, although not the first to be written. Paul wrote it to the church at Rome, which included both Jews and Gentiles. His primary theme is the basics of*

the good news of Christ: salvation for all people.

Paul has said that Christians, reconciled to God, will be saved, sharing in the risen life of Christ. Two notions are important here:

- the punishment for Adam’s sin was to die both physically and spiritually (“*death came through sin*”); and
- we both sin ourselves and we also share in Adam’s sin (“*death spread to all*” – **vs. 12**).

Paul contrasts Adam and Christ, both inaugurators of eras.

Adam foreshadowed Christ as head of humanity (“*type*” (pattern) **vs. 14**, precursor).

Adam disobeyed God's direct command (*"the transgression"* of vs. 14, *"the trespass"* of vs. 15).

The "free gift" of vs. 15, i.e. Christ, is unlike Adam's sin:

- "many died" before Christ's coming **but even more so**, "many" are saved through Christ; (indeed all who will be saved, are saved through Christ).
- Adam was condemned to separation from God but Christ brings union with God (vv. 16, 18);
- Adam's sin allowed "*death*" (vs. 17) to rule through ("that one") but through Christ, we let good rule our hearts (*"dominion in life"*); and

- Adam's action led to the sin of many but Christ's will *lead many to godliness* (vs. 19), to "*eternal life*" (vs. 21).

Reflection

What does the "sin of Adam" mean to you?

Reflect on the story presented in Genesis this week, and referenced here in Romans: what do you believe happened in "the Fall"?

Take some answers from the floor*****

- Man became a moral agent.
- He was changed from who he had been, into what he now was – a sinner.
- Man lost his place in God's kingdom.

- Man became permanently ‘bent’ in a bad direction.

This might be a good time to remind us what we teach about sin in the Church of the Nazarene. Let me read from our Manual – The Articles of Faith.

Article 5

5. We believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, and death by sin. We believe that sin is of two kinds: original sin or depravity, and actual or personal sin.

5.1. We believe that original sin, or **depravity**, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone:

- is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation,
- is averse to God
- is without spiritual life, and
- is inclined to evil, and that continually.

We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until the heart is fully cleansed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

5.2. We believe that original sin differs from actual sin in that it constitutes an inherited propensity to actual sin for which no one is accountable until its divinely provided remedy is neglected or rejected.

5.3. We believe that actual or personal sin is a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person.

So, there you have it – our corporate belief about that subject we all hate to talk about – sin.

Our **Common Lectionary** brings us our next scripture passage to look at.

Matthew 4:1-11

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

³The tempter came and said to him, "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*" ⁴But he answered, "*It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "*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, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'*" ⁷Jesus said to him, "*Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said

to him, *"All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."* ¹⁰Jesus said to him, *"Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"* ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Commentary

In **Mark**, only the essential historical facts are recorded. A mere 2 verses speak to Jesus time of temptation – vs. 12-13. The disciples probably knew none of the details of Jesus' trials, for temptation is essentially a personal inner battle with one's conscience.

“**Forty days**” (vs. 2) reminds us of Moses and Elijah, both of whom also fasted for forty days as they prepared for their roles as God’s agents to Israel –as does Jesus.

All three of the temptations the Devil (“*the tempter*”, vs. 3, “*Satan*”, vs. 10) presents to Jesus are **ways of sinning against the great commandment in...**

Deuteronomy 6:5: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*”

The “*heart*” was the seat of will, of moral choice;

“**soul**” means life;

“**strength**” means possessions – everything you have and are.

(All of Jesus’ answers were from **Deuteronomy Chapters 6 thru 8.**)

To change “stones” (vs. 3) into bread would be to use his power for his personal benefit.

Jesus says that the “*word*” (vs. 4) of God is the chief nourishment.

The “holy city” (vs. 5) is Jerusalem; a “pinnacle” probably overlooked the temple courts and the deep Kidron Valley. Jesus answers: **testing God’s protection by unnecessarily risking life is a mockery of real martyrdom –and of his sacrifice to come (v. 7).**

The Devil – evil forces personified – invites Jesus to prefer personal wealth and power over love of God (vs. 8-9).

Jesus answers: God is the only god to be worshipped and served (vs. 10).

The details make the point that **Jesus is the perfect lover of God**, the ideal Israelite, **the founder of a new way of being human.**

Reflection

Q.

How does this account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness speak to your own encounters with temptation?

Q.

Does it help and encourage you in your walk of discipleship to know that even our Lord was tempted by the lures of political power, spiritual authority, and wealth?

Remember that Jesus knew the scriptures. But He didn't just "know them," **He utilized them** to defend Himself against the very same type of attacks that we fall prey to.

During this season of Lent, let's use all of the tools available to us to stand against the wiles of the Devil.

Ephesians 6 is a great reminder of the weaponry that we can wield in this life of battle against the enemy of our souls. Specifically, verses 10 – 18.

I mentioned one of the typical means of making Lent count in our lives – that of confession of sin.

It can be tempting to rationalize our sin; not wanting to confess that we are “less than” who we have been called to be, in Christ Jesus.

But there is a Psalm which speaks to the joy that can be ours if we will only confess our every failure to the Father who loves us.

Psalm 32: 1-6

¹Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered. ²Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit, there is no deceit.

³While I kept silence; my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah.

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and **you forgave the guilt of my sin.** Selah.

⁶Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

PRAYER

COMMUNION

802. THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Hear the words of the Apostle Paul as he speaks to the Corinthian believers regarding the Lord's Supper.

- **1 Corinthians 11:23-29**

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup,

saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.* ²⁷*So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸*Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.* ²⁹*For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.*

Let the minister then give the following invitation:

The Lord himself ordained this holy sacrament. He commanded His disciples to partake of the bread and wine, emblems of His broken body and shed blood. This is His table. The feast is for His disciples. Let all those who have with true repentance forsaken their sins, and have believed in Christ unto salvation, draw near and take these emblems, and, by faith, partake of the life of Jesus Christ, to your soul's comfort and joy. Let us remember that it is the memorial of the death and passion of our Lord; also, a token of His coming again. **Let us not forget that we are one, at one table with the Lord.**

The minister may offer a prayer of confession and supplication, concluding with the following prayer of consecration:

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father; in Your tender mercy gave Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption: hear us, we most humbly ask You.

Grant that, as we receive these, Your creatures of bread and wine according to the holy institution of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, in remembrance of His passion and death, we may be made partakers of the benefits of His atoning sacrifice.

We are reminded that in the same night that our Lord was betrayed, He took bread and, when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, *“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”*

Likewise, after supper, He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

May we come before You in true humility and faith as we partake of this holy sacrament. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Then may the minister, partaking first, with the assistance of any other ministers present, and when necessary, of the stewards, administer the Communion to the people.

While the bread is being distributed, let the minister say:

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was broken for you, preserve you blameless, unto everlasting life. Take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for you.

As the cup is being passed, let the minister say:

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve you blameless unto everlasting life. Drink this, in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

After all have partaken, the minister may then offer a concluding prayer of thanksgiving and commitment.

(29.5, 514.4, 514.9, 530.7, 531.2, 532.1)

NOTE: Only unfermented wine should be used in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

BENEDICTION

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lectionary Study Guide

For use the week of:
February 24 – March 1, 2020

1stSunday in Lent: March 1, 2020