

Pastor T.C. Arnold
7th Sunday after Trinity
Genesis 2:7-17
July 14th, 2013

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 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.

Have you ever read the book, or perhaps seen the movie, “The Secret Garden,” written by Frances Burnett more than 100 years ago? It’s about a sour-faced and rude child, Mary Lennox, who was born to wealthy British parents in India. She was mostly cared for and raised by servants – and so forgotten, that when her mother and father died because of the cholera epidemic, no one even realized that Mary was still alive, hidden in her room.

She was sent to live with her uncle back in England who had a large manor with a huge house and garden. Mary was told to stay in her room and not snoop around. She eventually wandered outside and discovered a garden that no one had been in since her uncle’s wife died many years earlier. She eventually found her way inside – though forbidden to be in the secret garden, she loved being there and would eventually take others along to enjoy it as well.

Now, there are not too many parallels to the secret garden and the garden of Eden that you heard about in the Old Testament text for today. God put Adam in the garden to work it. It was not forbidden for him to be there. He was supposed to be there. But, there was one thing in the garden that was forbidden. He was not supposed to eat of one tree that God made and put in the garden. The sour-faced and rude Mary Lennox was not supposed to be in the secret garden. Adam was, but there was still something forbidden in that garden. There are rules for Eden. Rather, there is one rule for the garden. God gave it, and it was to be followed. Are there rules for your garden?

Do you have a garden? If you do, do you have rules for your garden? Can anyone come into your garden and pick the plants clean of all its fruit? Can you get by without watering it for days on end if the weather is hot and dry? There are rules that you make for your garden. There are “natural” rules you must follow, like giving your plants water and nutrients. It’s impossible to have no rules.

God gives rules for His garden. He did so for Adam – just one rule – and He does so for you. Yes, there are natural rules for tending your garden. You must follow them. There are rules for tending your garden call life. You must follow them. You can’t do just anything and everything. There are responsibilities you have in taking care of your life and the lives of others. There are rules and we must obey.

I hope this is all cut and dry for you this morning. I’m not trying to use fancy language or complicated illustrations. Here’s what I’m saying... There are rules. God expects you to follow the rules. Some rules are simple... you must eat... you must feed your garden for it to live. These are simple natural rules. There are also rules for your garden – your life – that are revealed to you. They are for your good. Have only one God. That means nothing is a god above God... but we don’t hesitate to treat Him as second best when other things become more important. We all do this. There is a law revealed by God about treating our neighbor with respect and love. There is a law revealed by God about treating those in your family, those in

authority, with respect and honor. Do we do that? Sometimes yes and then other times not really. God says, stop it. For your own good and for the good of your neighbor, friends and family – stop it. Broken rules leads to hurt and destruction. And nowhere was this more evident than in that first garden.

There was one rule for Adam and then Adam and Eve in the first garden. Because they broke that rule – eating of the forbidden fruit from the forbidden tree – we now live with many rules. You see, God gave that rule for a reason – just as God gives us rules to live by today for a reason. The reason for Adam and Eve was for protection. If they were able to see what God could see – good AND evil – then man would see what evil causes – destruction. Adam and Eve couldn't see that – they didn't know that. God only showed them the good.

Now, I know there is another question you are asking... and maybe this is where the simple, straight-forward sermon gets confusing and convoluted. But I know some of you are asking this question... and I'm not sure I have a good answer. "Why did God create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the first place?" That's hard to answer. Luther said that it was for Adam that God made the tree. In other words God established the law with that tree – that God was going to be God over Adam and all creation and Adam now could demonstrate reverence and obedience to God in perfect worship by not eating from it. I understand that – but it's still hard to understand. See, leave it to your pastor to make an easy sermon hard to understand.

Beloved, understand this... it's not complicated. While we cannot know the mysteries of God with absolute certainty, there is something – one thing – that is not mysterious. It's truth. Sin entered the world by way of a tree in a garden. And the promise of salvation was procured for you in a different garden – on top of a mount called Calvary – on a different tree – the true tree of life... the cross. There is no mystery about this. God took your sins onto Himself and died on the tree of the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. In our sins we are with Adam in the garden of Eden eating what is forbidden. God says, "Stop it! Don't eat!" But as we already have, we need a Savior. That is why we are taken to a different garden to see our Jesus in the Gospel dying on our behalf – dying because of our sins – dying because He loves us to death. We pray about this right before we have communion in one of our liturgies.

Turn to page 209 in your hymnal. Look at the second paragraph down in the Prayer of Thanksgiving. Let's say that together... *"In your righteous judgment You condemned the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, and You justly barred them and all their children from the tree of life. Yet, in Your great mercy, You promised salvation by a second Adam, Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and made His cross a life-giving tree for all who trust in Him."*

Jesus is the second and greater Adam talked about in the communion liturgy in Divine Service Four. He turned death into life. He gives what we cannot earn on our own. He gives us strength to endure our days because we know we have a Jesus who knows more suffering than all of us combined. Jesus promises salvation to all who believe. That means, we will see the blessed garden called Heaven... and it is not forbidden to us. Jesus is the gate to that garden. It's no secret. Tell it to the world (Go tell it on the Mountain). He reveals life to you in His Word. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.