

(Joke about boy and “losing God”)

I had a teacher when I went to College of Emmanuel and St. Chad in Saskatoon, a Professor Sandra Beardsall – she was a United Church minister who earlier had pastored a congregation in Labrador. While there she was supplied with a truck, which it turned out had a red “cherry light” on top, like that of an old-fashioned police car. She said she didn't think much about it until one day she drove up to a stop in town and was told the remark when she got there was “Here comes Reverend Sandra, in her 'sinner catcher.’”

Some people think that is what the role of a Christian is, actually: a “sinner catcher” -- find people when they are doing wrong, and then tell them nine million different ways how what they are doing is wrong, and how they are bound for hell, etc. etc. etc. -- make them feel as miserable as they can. The truth is that we clergy do enough things wrong that we have ourselves to fully worry about, without worrying about what anyone else is doing! We are definitely not eligible to throw stones – in fact, as the writings of today say, none of us are eligible to throw stones – we have all done something wrong – and we are all eligible for redemption, if we have not already grasped it.

Humanity have been doing things wrong since the very first people were created – as the Bible tells us. The reading from Genesis goes right back to the very beginning, and is a story you could say, of the “big one:” original sin and the fall of humanity.

In the first chapter of Genesis, it talks about the creation of everything. It relates how God reflects to himself after each step, that things are good: God makes the land and the seas, God saw that it was good. God made the plants, God saw that it was good. God made the sun, the moon, and the stars, God saw that it was good. God made the sea creatures and the flying animals, God saw that it was good. God made the land animals, God saw that it was good. God made people and set everything in place, and God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good. Good, good, good, very very good.

Then comes the chapter that was read for us this morning – and all of a sudden, things are **not** so good. God tells us “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 die.” Understand that death is essentially separation. To die physically means separation from the land of the living. To die spiritually means separation from God. The serpent told Eve “you shall not die...” and the serpent was right: Eve did not physically die. However, the serpent also lied: for Eve (and Adam) did spiritually die. Why did we chose to eat of what God forbade us? Well, as it says “you will be like God” (knowing good and evil) .. Sin originates in our desire to be like God, to be God.

Who amongst us hasn't wanted to get our own way? Who amongst us DOESN'T get annoyed if things don't happen like we desired them? I know for myself, I have found myself sometimes feeling really annoyed – and wondering why I am so upset – until it finally comes to me that I'm upset not because of the way things went or what was decided, or who did what etc., but because things didn't happen exactly how I had planned in my head that they should! How silly, eh? That is all part of our desire to be God – we desire to not only influence, but control how things happen so that they can happen exactly how and when we want them to.

This part of why I think farming is such an amazing occupation: you plant, you may fertilize and spray, and you harvest – and beyond that, you don't control or even influence much at all. If it rains, it rains. If it snows, it snows. -- you just have to trust that you'll have a harvest -- in a way, farming forces one

to depend on God, because we realize how little is, actually, under our control.

It is our human nature to want to control things, control events, control other people – not necessarily to be nasty, but so “things go right” -- of course, go right to how WE define 'right', or 'proper', or whatever way we think of it – in other words, it is human nature to want to be God – not only over our own lives, but over those around us too. And if we don't get our way, in the most extreme we rape, murder, and kill. To not such an extreme, perhaps, we still harm each other (and ourselves too), by our comments, our thoughts to ourselves, our actions. We get hurt and angry – and we lash out.

So our original sin, our original missing the mark of what God desires, which infects all of humanity, is that we, universally, wish to be God ourselves – and as is shown in the story of Adam and Eve, when we reach for the fruit of having our own way, we leave knowing only good, by getting an understanding of evil as well. We tell God “I don't trust you! I shall rather trust myself instead.” We become like God (knowing good AND evil) because we do something evil – we choose our own path instead of the path God has designed for us. We put ourselves above each other. The criticism, the grudges, the anger, the hurt, even the hatred – can become all-consuming and last for generations – such toxicity poisons people long after the original event occurred. And God sees this, and God says: “this is NOT good.”

So God, in God's love, offers us a way out. The only way out of the situation is through repentance and forgiveness. Our psalm of today encourages us in this: “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” How are our transgressions forgiven? Well, as it says: '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.'

It is through us acknowledging to God almighty that we have missed the mark, we have fallen short, we have, in other words, sinned: we confess to God, and re-dedicate ourselves to walking with God in God's way – it is through that, that we find that God wants to rebuild, renew our relationship with Him, and readily extends forgiveness to us. In that forgiveness we renew our trust in God, and find that we are, indeed, brought back to life: our separation from God disappears. We find that steadfast love does indeed surround us, and we can be glad in the Lord. We can rejoice, and shout for joy, and be glad: for we are redeemed, we are paid for, we are justified.

This is what Paul is talking about in his letter to the Romans – we are justified not because of anything we have done, but because of what Christ did – giving His life for ours. By His obedience, freely dying on the cross and breaking the separation of God and us, we are made righteous, we are made holy, we are made able to stand in God's throne room and sing His praises – we are made able to walk with God, and not be afraid. The good of Christ more than overcomes the evil of Adam.

This is the Christ that we see in the Gospel. Jesus did not have an easy time of it! It's not as if God said “well, I'll just sit here, wave my wand, and make everything right.” -- no, God said “I shall live my life with my people just as they live, and shall give my life for them so we may be one again.” Adam and Eve, all of us – were tempted and fell. Jesus too was tempted – but Jesus did not fall. His three temptations are all variations of “go and control your life.”

He is tempted to create bread to eat rather than depend on His father – we too are tempted in such a way, to make as much as we can, definitely more than we need, in order to ensure our survival. We forget to rely on our Father – as Jesus said “Do not worry about what you will eat or wear – your heavenly Father knows what you need and will supply you.” We are tempted to become as rich as we

can, so that we can have as much as we want – which totally misses the point that God gives us more than we need anyway. The second temptation – just think how famous He would have been if He would have thrown Himself from the temple and everyone saw God rescue Him! The third temptation – just think how powerful He would have been to have all nations of the earth!

Wealth, fame, power – three common temptations that we all fall too, and three variations of “I want to be God, as much as I can -- I want to have others look up to me, I want to have things done my way”

All of us have fallen short of our identities as Images of God – we have tried to become images of ourselves, and been spiritually dead. But, as the scripture readings today attest to, there is a way out of this despair, for us and for all people – and that is, as I said, repentance and the resulting deliverance and forgiveness.

Then we find that we are not a people of misery, a people of condemnation, a people of anger, but rather a people of joy, a people of understanding, a people of love. Those are the characteristics of those who are Images of God. Those are **your** characteristics. You are a people of joy, a people of understanding, a people of love – even if you don't realize it yet. As Genesis tells us, you were created good – in our blindness we just make mistakes, that's all.

So, I urge you, today, when we have our time of confession and absolution, truly search your heart, search your mind, and ask God where you have fallen short – and what God reveals to you, give up to Him and dedicate yourself to changing, to walking with Jesus in love, instead. I shall give a longer than usual pause at that time for you to offer anything which comes up inside you, to God. And then, when I pronounce to you your forgiveness from God, grasp it with all your being – take hold of it, and own it – you will be forgiven, and can walk anew in His light, with love and caring in your heart. Feel God's forgiveness in your heart, and know it in your mind, in your soul.

As Christians, we are not “sinner catchers” -- we are “sinner free-ers.” In Jesus' name we pronounce God's love to all and sundry – and we own that we too have been freed, and are now alive again, freed from the power of the serpent in the tree, and able to eat of the other tree in the garden: the tree of life.

May you know such joy, and live with the bread of life, the tree of life: Jesus our loving Messiah. May you too, be a 'sinner free-er'.

To God be the glory – in Jesus' name;

Amen.