

First Sunday in Lent – February 26th, 2023
A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

Prayer

Abba, Father, help us to understand how your son Jesus restored the relationship between you and your creation that was broken when Adam ate the forbidden fruit.

Amen

Children of Men

All of us are children of Adam – born according to natural law from one generation to the next. Adam’s sin changed or corrupted his very nature – and we have inherited that sin nature. A couple of passages remind us of these truths:

(Rom 3:23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

(1 John 1:8) If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Sin is NOT something that has to be learned, and it’s not merely disobeying societal rules. Ask the parent of an infant or toddler if there they are self-centered, if they lie, if they take what isn’t theirs, etc. and the answer will be a resounding “YES.”

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Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of John (John 3:6), said when talking to Nicodemus *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* This is just one example where scripture contrasts the flesh with the spirit. However, we must avoid that ancient false teaching, that heresy, that says that the material flesh is evil; it was created good by God and has become corrupt, but not evil. However, because of the corruption and sin our bodies do become sick. We age, our bodies eventually wear out, and we die, just as God promised (Gen 2:17). Other consequences of the fall include a woman's pain in childbirth and the fact that work is hard!

Adam's disobedience broke the close relationship between God and His creation – contrast the fact that Adam walked with God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis) and Moses is told that *"you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* (Exodus 3:20).

And this change wasn't just temporary; spiritual death is eternal. It is everlasting separation from God. Indeed, paradise had been lost.

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From our perspective, bound as we are by time, God immediately promised to defeat Satan once and for all and to restore the relationship between Himself and His creation. One step in that plan was to reveal Himself to a nomadic herdsman as the one true God.

The Law

After God called Abraham, he set apart his descents, Isaac, and his son Jacob, who is also called Israel, to be a holy people – set apart for His glory. He gave them the Law. As Paul write in Galatians (Galatian 3:24) the Law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Luther's Small Catechism speaks of three uses of the law today:

- (1) First, the Law helps to control violent outbursts of sin and keeps order in the world (a curb).
- (2) Second, the Law accuses us and shows us our sin (a mirror).
- (3) Third, the Law teaches us Christians what we should and should not do to live a God-pleasing life (a guide). The power to live according to the Law comes from the Gospel."

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Children of God

In addition, all who trust in Christ are children of God – born according to the supernatural promise first hinted at in Genesis. This is not our doing, for we are by nature dead to God. No, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into us and to adopt us individually into God's family.

Our adoption, yours and mine, was made possible through the obedient life, unjust death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus, God's only begotten son. As we read in the text (Rom 5:18)

so, one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

It isn't our act – we can contribute nothing to our salvation. It's offered to us as a free gift, no strings attached. And I can confidently proclaim that this one-time sacrifice satisfied God's justice for YOU – no matter what you've done or not done in thought, word, or deed, because when it says that one act of righteousness leads to justification for ALL, it means exactly that - each and every one who has lived, is living, or will live.

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This justification is like the ads we see on the internet, we can't select what we see, we can only opt-out. God permits us to reject the gift and say, in effect, that we want to face His wrath alone.

Through Christ, paradise has been restored, and we can look forward to an eternity with God in Heaven.

Both And

Our eternal future is secured, but what about the here and now? I'm not sure if Luther coined the saying but was certainly a favorite of his – we are simultaneously saint and sinner, holy as adopted Sons of God, yet while on this side of death, a corrupt human nature through Adam.

Again, for most of us, this dual nature began when we were Baptized and were given the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes to us in person to glorify Christ in every believer as He works to create God's family on the earth—that is, the Church as God's household. He is called the Spirit of truth (John 16:13) and our Advocate (John 14:26). When He indwells the life of the believer, He takes the truth of the words of Christ, and reveals their depth of meaning to that individual.

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Building upon that foundation laid at our Baptism, God uses His word to remake us, to sanctify us, in the image of Christ. As is says in Hebrews (Heb 4:12):

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised that He would be with us as we partake with the saints across time and space in the marriage feast of the lamb, Jesus Christ, God's only son.

It's my prayer for each of us that we would never reject God's gift of eternal life and that we would avail ourselves of the mean of grace that He uses to both call us to Himself and to purify us, so that we are fit to be the Bride of Christ.

AMEN