

“Temptation, Fall, and Promise of Reconciliation”

Genesis 3:1-21; Matthew 4:1-11

Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent 2022; March 6, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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In the Old Testament reading this morning, the Scripture presents the temptation of Adam and Eve by the devil at the beginning of the human story. Let us spend a few moments with this in Jesus’ Name.

In considering the devil’s temptation of Eve, I am always struck with how central God’s spoken word is. The first thing the devil said to Eve was “[d]id God really say that you may not eat of all the trees of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). The point of attack was: “Did God really say.” Jesus also brings the centrality of God’s word into focus in our relationship to God in His response to the devil. Jesus said: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Why does the devil attack Eve at the point of what God said? It is because the devil’s goal is to get Adam and Eve not to believe in God, and so rebel against His command. The point is faith. God’s command goes with faith and the submission of their wills to God through faith, so that God would continue to be God in their minds, and hearts, and actions. The battleground was all about faith, and the contest for faith was fought at the point of God’s command. The battle for faith was that Adam and Eve would continue to believe that God was good and generous, and that they would continue to trust God’s wisdom and judgment above their own thought, judgment, and feeling. This battle takes place at the point of what God had said to them.

Now we need to recall what God actually commanded Adam and Eve. This was in Genesis chapter two. It says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die’” (Genesis 2:16-17 ESV).

God said, “You may eat of all of the trees in the garden.” God had created all kinds of trees in the garden. God is good and generous. There all kinds of good things that God has created for us to enjoy. He created the one tree that He commanded them not to eat from. Let’s say that the ratio was 1,000 to one. So eat of all of these, but not this one. They would have to trust God’s judgment. At this command, faith would find a place for exercise. So the devil attacks at that point.

The devil says to Eve, “Did God really say you may not eat of all the trees in the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). One of the devil’s strategies is to twist what God actually said. In this case, it was to try to cause Eve to begin to doubt that God is really good. We can see how the devil was twisting God’s words when we consider this. God did not say that you may not eat of all the trees of the garden. God did say that you may eat of all of the trees of the garden, except this one.

The devil was twisting God’s words. He was doing this to use the power of suggestion to get Eve to think that God was holding out on her, that there is so much good and pleasure in the world, and yet God does not want her to have any of it. The point of the devil’s twisting God’s word is this: God is not really so good and generous after all. That suggestion was a lie, but then Jesus tells us that the devil was a liar from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44).

Unfortunately, the power of suggestion worked. Eve replied by saying that God had said that they may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and not even to

touch it, or they would die (Genesis 3:3). But God did not tell them they could not touch it. There could have been many reasons why they would need to touch that tree in their offices as lords over creation (Genesis 1:26, 28). Faith would have been adequate not to *eat* the fruit of that tree even if they had to touch it. Eve was going beyond God's command here.

The devil pounces. He flatly contradicts God's word: "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). God said you will die. The devil says you will not die.

And then the devil purports to speak for God: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5 ESV). Here is another characteristic of the devil. He is audacious and supremely arrogant. He comes right out and contradicts what God said. The arrogance is that the devil claims to speak for God and to really know God's mind apart from what God had actually said.

In this audacity and arrogance, the devil plants the seed in the human heart that is the root of all evil: "You will be like God." God knows that when you eat of it, you will be like God. See, God was actually testing you to be daring, to dare to go beyond what God said, knowing that if you dare, then you will be like God. God knows this, says the devil. This is the secret wisdom of the wise, says the devil. When God said no, He really meant yes.

Eve gave in. It was probably not malicious intent. Certainly, to be like God to her would not have been a bad thing. But she had gotten confused. She had become confused because she had lost sight of God's command. God's command was clear. Do not eat this. If you do you will die. Come back to faith, Eve, and you will live. But there is no way for Eve to come back to faith in her own strength.

She looked at the tree. It looked good for food, just like the other trees (Genesis 3:6). It looked good for satisfying a basic bodily need; food.

The devil also tempted Jesus at this point. Jesus was hungry. The devil said to Him: "Speak to these stones so that they become bread" (Matthew 4:3). God would certainly not want you to be hungry. Come on, use your power to help yourself. But Jesus says, unlike Eve, and Adam with her, "It has been written" (Matthew 4:4). And what has been written? "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Back to Eve. When she looked at the tree, it also gave her desire. It was a delight to her eyes (Genesis 3:6). It was desire, however, for something God had not given. Here is a basic principle of faith and morality. Just because something is a pleasure to look at and stimulates desire for it does not mean that one can act on the desire and take it, and still be in the good, the true, and the right.

The devil did something similar with Jesus. The devil said, "Look at all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory. I will give them to you Jesus if you worship me" (Matthew 4:8-9). Here is the proverbial deal with the devil. Serve the devil and get the glories of this world. Doing anything to get the glories of this world is justified. Jesus says, "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Matthew 4:10).

Back to Eve, she saw the tree as something desired to make her wise (Genesis 3:6). This is the clincher. Her judgment had become corrupted. She thought that by indulging in the thing that God told her not to indulge in, she would find wisdom. She thought that she would be elevated to finding her true humanity and knowledge of God and the world. She did not realize at the time that by going down that road, she would find not wisdom, but selfishness; she would not find true humanity, but the destruction of humanity; she would not find true knowledge of God, but falling from knowledge of God. This was the devil's goal. So the devil is a murderer, which Jesus also tells us (John 8:44). The devil hates human beings, because human beings are a special

creation of God. He wants us to die, and even better to die under God's judgment against sin.

Adam was there with Eve. She gave some of the fruit to Adam. He ate (Genesis 3:6). Their eyes were immediately opened, but not toward wisdom, but toward shame. They did not become like God. They knew immediately and for the first time the fear and dread of God (Genesis 3:10). They also found selfishness. Adam blamed his wife and then also God for his loss of faith and his consequent actions in rebelling against God's command (Genesis 3:12). Did Adam take personal responsibility? No. Of course, Eve was twisting Adam's arm, "putting a gun to his head," so to speak, right?. No, she wasn't. Eve blamed the devil (Genesis 3:13); the devil made me do it. Trust in God and fellowship with God and one another was broken.

So it takes redemption and reconciliation to restore what was natural and completely pure at the beginning. But this redemption and reconciliation would now not be complete until the new creation. There must be death first. From dust you were created. To dust you shall return (Genesis 3:19).

But this is not the end of the story, thank God. Here is the depth of God's grace. In the midst of their listening to the devil and casting aside faith in God's command, God promised redemption and reconciliation and gave them a glimpse of how it would happen. God spoken again. But this time God's speaking was a promise. God promised that a Son of Eve would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). He would destroy the power of the devil; that power being sin and death. This Son would have His heel crushed in the battle with the serpent (Genesis 3:15), but not His head, that is, not ultimately His power. This promise from God would create faith once again.

The Scripture also shows us that this triumph over the devil by this Son of Eve would involve sacrifice. It says toward the end of the chapter that the LORD God made clothing for Adam and Eve out of animal skins (Genesis 3:21). This required the sacrifice of an animal *by God* to clothe them. Redemption from sin and death and reconciliation with God requires a sacrifice of God's choosing and that God would make.

And so the Son of Eve came as the Son of the virgin Mary. He came in human flesh and took on the devil and did not give in (Matthew 4:1-11). His victory is now our strength not to give in, as we also cling to God's word. He also came as the sacrificial lamb, whose sacrifice would take way our sin (John 1:29). And He would rise out of the death of that sacrifice and take life once again. That was the eternal life that Adam and Eve would have tasted from the tree of life had they kept faith in God's word. But this Son of Eve kept faith. And He fulfilled God's promise and became the sacrifice that covers shame, and guilt, and takes away our sin. As we say yes to Him and believe that our sins are forgiven because of Him, we have that eternal life as a beginning and as a promise of complete fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

We could grieve at how Adam and Eve fell and brought misery to the human race. We should be sorry for the exhibition of the fall in our own lives. But we rejoice that in the middle of it also, God gave the promise. In the midst of our fallen, broken, and evil world, in the midst of it, God fulfilled His promise in Eve's greatest Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And here He feeds us, through His word and Sacrament with the redemption this Son of Eve has won; He finds us on this Son Himself, who is our life. And so we live before God forever, in Him. And in Him, we find the desire to live according to God's word. Let us draw near to Jesus in faith always, being students and followers of God's written and spoken word. Amen.