

“One for All”

For 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 (Romans 5:19).

You just heard two of the most important readings in the entire Bible. In fact, today's Old Testament lesson includes information that is foundational for every Christian, and the burden it imposes on us is met in full by what happens in the tale of Christ's Temptation. These truths are critical for us to hear today because, you see, they frame our own story, and realizing what God is doing today through these narratives will have a great bearing on how we live in the world. And Paul understood this.

In fact, today's text from Romans is a profound commentary on our other two readings, and Paul's message to us in our Epistle is the perfect way to begin the penitential season of Lent. Today's reading from starts with these words, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin...so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). The opening line of this reading points us straight back to the Garden of Eden, and what we find as this scene unfolds is the very first temptation. Here in the Garden, the serpent approaches Eve with a question that still stands at the center of every temptation: “Did God actually say?” By sowing this seed of doubt, the devil had started to turn the eyes of our first parents from a reliance on God and His Word, to a self-centered vision of truth and a worldview independent of their Creator. And without putting up much of a fight at all, Adam and Eve fell hard, and in the moment of their disobedient demise, death owned the world.

It's important for us to think clearly about the circumstances surrounding this epic failure, because the sin of our first parents which condemned every human being to death, came in a perfect world. You see, they were in an idyllic setting where everything was provided for them. They walked with God in intimate harmony, and they lived with each other in a union of heart, body, and mind that was untainted by self-interest. They had every need met, and yet, there in the Garden, they chose a path of disobedience, and in one rebellious flash, everything changed. Now, as Paul writes, “death reigned” and this reality of sin and the brokenness it brings, is a legacy that we cannot escape.

You, and the preacher speaking to you, and everyone sitting around you were all conceived in sin and born to die. We feel it in our bodies and we see it in our world. From the brutalities we endure, to the cruelties we inflict, the original sin of Adam and Eve is a constant presence in our lives. It taints our days and haunts our nights, and it all ends in death. And, as if these physical realities of sin aren't bad enough, the Bible also tells us that our sin has separated us from God, and this broken relationship carries with it an eternal consequence that we cannot change.

Adam and Eve rejected God's Word. They walked away from their Creator, and they willfully and wantonly chose death. But God did not leave them in their disobedience, and, into the silence of their self-imposed separation, God spoke a promise. In words directed to the serpent, God made a pledge to provide a man born to the woman who would crush the devil and reverse the curse that his temptation had wrought on the world. And from the moment God made this promise in the Garden, everything in the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. Every story and every

character; every sacrifice and every song; from the Flood of Noah to the Exodus from Egypt, and from Moses to the Prophets, every line of Scripture pointed to the promised One who would redeem God's people. And the glue that holds our readings together today, and the Word of God that Paul proclaims is the message that 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" (Romans 5:19). And that is where today's Gospel reading from Matthew comes in.

You see, Matthew begins his record of Jesus' ministry with the story of His temptation. Don't miss this! Before any miracles are recorded and any teaching is shared, Jesus is tempted by the devil. But the circumstances surrounding His temptation were vastly different from the temptation in the Garden. Instead of being surprised by the serpent, Matthew tells us that Jesus was led into this trial "by the Spirit." And rather than a lush Garden teeming with life, Jesus was brought into a barren wilderness where He was surrounded by death. And where Adam and Eve had been given every plant for food and lacked nothing, Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights and He was hungry. And into this deserted place of need, the devil came calling again.

Like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, the devil must have been licking his chops at the easy prey in front of him. After all, if Satan had succeeded in the ancient abundance of the Garden, he would certainly be successful in the face of such dire physical need, and so the serpent spoke again. And just as he had tempted Eve and Adam in the Garden, the devil promised power and promoted independence; he manipulated Scripture and he challenged the Creator's commands; and yet there in the desert, weak with hunger and utterly alone, this second Adam – this new man – remained faithful in the face of temptation and He defeated Satan...and He did it all for you!

The most important Word in today's Epistle reading is God's promise that the obedience of Jesus is for you. Paul writes, "And the free gift is not like the result of (Adam's) sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:16-17).

Your disobedience was redeemed in the wilderness, and your sin was punished on the cross, and just "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Romans 5:19). One for all! That's the message of today's readings, and, if we're honest, *this makes no sense to us*. According to the world, and to our human nature, this is not equitable. Our reason tells us there must be a way we can contribute to this process and make up for our sin. But the Word of God silences this arrogant need to save ourselves, and instead, this is God's response to our sin: "You have a substitute." God sent His one and only Son to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, and during this season of Lent, as you are condemned by your sins of disobedience, you can also rejoice in the truth that by the one man's obedience you have been made righteous.

You were born into the world of Adam, but now you have been reborn into Christ. That's what happened in your baptism. You have been justified, you have been reconciled, you have been saved, and through the One man who gave his life for you, you have eternal life...and that life begins right now. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today. Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold