

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
Genesis 3:8-15; Revelation 20:1-6; Mark 3:20-35

Let the creationists and evolutionists bicker away, but in my book there is no more thoroughly believable and conceivable account than that which we receive in Genesis 3, the account of the fall into sin, because the humans involved are oh so human, and the unwinding of events is ancient in its origin but repeated every day and in every age, no matter how far we tell ourselves we've progressed. I don't care what country you live in, what kind of car you drive or phone you blather on, who is your president, prime minister, or king, Genesis 3 is inescapable. You relive it every day and often find yourselves seemingly helplessly mired in it. The account before us in our first lesson leaves little to be debated, because it is rooted in the real world, in fact gives us the real world in which we find ourselves, even if a serpent talked and God walked among men at the time.

Let me show you what I mean. I'll give you the scenario. You tell me if you've seen it unwind, even more, if you've ever been a party to it. Temptation comes. Someone is led to doubt the truth of God's Word or at the very least conveniently set it aside for a few rebellious moments. At some point, that someone's sin becomes apparent and he or she is caught in it. Instead of owning up to what he or she has done, that someone makes excuses, points fingers, and casts blame, even perhaps at those who have tried to protect and help them out of the mess they've created. What do you think? Have you seen it? Have you been a party to it? Indeed, if there is anyone here who has never sinned and then tried to hide it, to excuse it, or to blame it on someone else, I would invite them to come forward now so we can ring the church bells, lift them high on our shoulders, and sing a *Sanctus* in their honor. Any liars, I mean, takers?

Genesis 3 has been a crushing weight on the world since the day it took place. Its consequences have been devastating. In Genesis 3, after the sin, husband and wife turned on each other. In Genesis 4, brother turned on brother and one slew the other. And it hasn't stopped since. We live in a world where marriages struggle and sometimes tragically break, where families implode, where one sinner blames another sinner for his or her own sin or feels superior to another when he or she has not yet committed the same sin in the same way. We live in a world where God's Word is valued not quite as much as "Dear Abby" or a MTV special, where many would rather hide from God or remake Him in their own image than face Him and confess their transgressions. We live in a world where friend betrays friend, where Peter robs Paul, where Caesar is often out more for his own fading legacy than the well-being of his citizens.

We live in a fallen world, a woefully fallen world, and one incapable of getting back on its feet again. We live in a mess. And you don't have to take my word for it. Drive around after the service. Drive to those places you used to consider nice neighborhoods, where you now get nervous and lock your doors, and ask why those places exist. Read the newspapers. Watch the news. Google some third-world nations. Listen to the disharmony that people dance to on the radio and watch a little of the unabashed and unblushing reality broadcast on the television. Look at a picture of your last family reunion and consider who was there and who wasn't. Think about the last thing that drove you to prayer, and the last thing you didn't even know how to pray for. Genesis 3 is as real as your next breath, as undeniable as the grave that one day will swallow you, as ancient as our first parents, as looming as the next storm clouds on the horizon.

The other day I was coaching T-ball. I like coaching T-ball, though I'm a bit hoarse, if you haven't noticed, during the season. The other day I was coaching T-ball and heard some of my players talking, and what I heard them talking about broke my heart. If anyone ever doubts the fall into sin, wonders if Genesis 3 is real, they should listen to the harsh reality of the real world as spoken through

the mouths of babes. Somehow we think children are too innocent for such things, but no one is innocent. We are born in sin and into a sinful world. The unborn die, the newborn die, those born long ago die. We live in a dying world, and even the most recently conceived are smothered under the dark veil that covers humanity undone, the work of the old Adam.

So, should I say “Amen” now and send you on your way? What a delightful service it would be, yes? But the facts are the facts, and life outside these walls—even, unfortunately and often, life inside these walls—is what it is. Yet is need not trump what will be, the “forever and ever. Amen” at the end of so much of what we sing and say here. The old Adam ought not distract us from the new Adam. Hear the words of our second lesson again:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power; but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

We cannot pull ourselves out of this mess, but there are pierced hands eager to do so. Our new Adam, our Jesus has seized the ancient serpent and cast him down. Victory is not ours to win. Victory has been won and is merely ours to celebrate, and at His coming, to enjoy for all eternity. *“Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power.”* Faith makes you those blessed and holy. Faith makes His resurrection yours, and faith is not something you magically pull out of your belly-button or conjure up in your emotions. No, faith is His unflappable gift to you, even as He was your gift on the cross from His Father.

Genesis 3 is as real as the hair in an aging man’s ears, as much as he doesn’t want it to be there. Who can look at this world and not at times sigh and moan and tire quickly of its visage? Who can peer into the darkness and not feel the fog that envelopes the fallen? But Christians do well not to lose themselves in the fog. There is something on the other side of the mist. There is something worth pressing onto. There is something just as worth seeing as this hard life is often worth forgetting. There is our Jesus, eager to wipe away every tear, ascended to prepare for us a new paradise, one we cannot nor never would dare to break. There is an end to the serpent’s schemes and an eternal beginning to the unfettered and unfathomable blessedness of the saints. Genesis 3 is as real as every scar on your body or mind, but Revelation 20 is as real the sacred wounds in which our refuge is found. Your Substitute is on your team, has taken your flesh. Cut the nets, hoist the trophy with Him. Embrace the world to come even as you must endure the world in which you now find yourself. And for all the bitterness you bear here, know that there is equal and exceedingly greater sweetness to come.

This world is so mad it thought our Lord crazy, but our sober Lord knew the only way to save the fallen was to be lifted up Himself. And lifted up He was to unite in the family of God those divided by sin. Be united in that love. Be His brothers and sisters as you accept and strive to do His will. Lift up your countenance to Him who makes His face shine upon you. Amen.