

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 3:8-15

The Dilemma of Sin

It had all started off so innocently, what with the Word of God and all, just slightly paraphrased. It made sense, what the devil was saying. The fruit did look good, but, then again, forbidden fruit always looks and tastes better. It's the aftertaste that'll kill you. One command. They had been given once command: don't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God did not want them to know sin and its horrible consequences. This was their one act of worship, and it was to their own benefit. But then the devil did what the devil does: he lied; and Eve did what those about to sin do: she listened.

And now look at them: naked, terrified by the presence the One whose presence before had been their delight. They'd always been naked. But now they knew they were naked. What God had created "good" was corrupted, turned into something carnal, something of giggles and blushes, something less than everything it was meant to be for a married couple. But when the covenant with God is broken, we can hardly expect the covenant of marriage to fare much better.

And here we start to see ourselves in their reactions, because the world ravaged by their sin is the world in which we live. They hid. Think about it. They hid from God—the One who knows and sees everything! And still a guilty conscience keeps us from God's service and, thus, from His grace. Or we put on hypocrisy, hide our sins under some church clothes, speak the words of confession as if we almost meant them, hearing an absolution that does not apply to the impenitent, and return home to our sin, as if we've pulled one over on our Maker. Hiding from God: it never works, yet it is still the refuge of those entangled in sin, even all these thousands of years later.

But God calls. He plays along like a father playing hide and seek, pretending to be baffled by the hiding spot of his child whose feet are sticking out from under the bed. "*Adam, where are you?*" How God bends down to our level! How very sad He must have been in this giant feat of love, as He seeks out the very child who hides from him in fear! "*Adam, where are you?*" And God knows where he is, and God knows what he has done, but God wants to give him a chance to confess, a chance to ask his Father's forgiveness, a chance to live, and so He plays along.

And we know the next part all too well. When caught, evade the issue. "*You see God, when I heard You, I hid, because I was scared, because I was naked.*" Talk about a smack in the face. Can any more painful words be heard by a father than that his child is afraid of him? He'd made Adam, given Him the world, formed the perfect helpmate for him, walked with him in Eden as a friend, and Adam is scared of him. Ouch! What kept God from bursting into tears right then and flooding the world in his sorrow, hundreds of years before Noah ever had a chance to build an ark?

And as the relationship with God shatters, notice how the marriage crumbles as well. Adam, the head of the family, the defender of his wife, says, "*I, I, I.*" Eve is out of the picture. This is self-preservation time for Adam. Sorry Eve, but he's going it alone on this one. You can rot. Sin's venom flows quickly, works disastrously, and manifests its symptoms obviously.

And God plays along, because He still loves Adam; He still longs for reconciliation, to bestow forgiveness upon His penitent son. "*Who told you that you were naked?*" And can you hear the pain in His voice? This is God's son, whom He loves, yet he refuses to trust Him, to love Him back. And now the chance to fess up: "*Did you eat from the forbidden tree, Adam?*" And there is no reason in the text to assume our LORD God asked this question angrily. In fact, His patience in this matter would seem to hint that it was asked with almost the sweetest ring of invitation.

And we know the next part all too well as well. When caught, when the issue can no longer be evaded, make excuses. *"It's not my fault."* There is a reason that one old confession of sins, the *Confiteor*, says: *"mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa."* "I have sinned...by my own fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault." Why stress my fault in the matter? Because fault is the hardest thing for a caught sinner to admit. Watch the news. Read the papers. Listen to children. Even worse, examine yourself.

"It's the woman's fault," Adam says. Perhaps Eve will fare better. *"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."* Nope. Did the woman play a role in Adam's sin? Yes, but Adam sinned, and Adam was accountable for his sin. Did the serpent play a role in Eve's sin? Yes, but Eve had sinned, and Eve was accountable for her sin. We don't repent of other's sins. We repent of our own sins. We need not waste our time confessing other's sins. Our sins, not our spouse's or neighbor's sins, are the sins that will drag us down to hell. Adam and Eve had their own confessing to do.

But we still haven't talked about the worst part. Adam doesn't just blame Eve. In fact, Eve gets off pretty easy in Adam's account. *"The woman YOU put here, God..."* Adam blames God! Adam turns God's greatest blessing to him, a wife, into a bane. God stoops down to Adam's level to hear confession and grant absolution but all he hears is accusation. *"How could you do this God?!"*

And we cash in our sins and whine, "How could you let this happen to me, God?!" Too lazy to fight temptation, we resign ourselves, "This is the way God made me." Paraphrasing God's Word a little too liberally to indulge in forbidden fruit, we spout, "God could've stopped me if He wanted to." God wants to give forgiveness, but we still cast blame. How base we are! What wretched we are! We are definitely our parents' children, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve! We corrupt what God has created "good." We turn God's blessing to bane. We run from the very One who wants to save us! But God can always see our feet sticking out from under the bed.

And here is where we'd expect God to let them have it, or at least to turn His back on them and walk away. After all, that is what we'd do. But no, God turns to the serpent. He curses him. And when we'd expect to first hear punishment spoken to our first parents, He instead speaks a promise. Yes, there would be consequences to Adam and Eve's sins, as the verses after our text show—temporal, earthly consequences—but there would also be hope. *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike his Heel."* A new Adam, a new man, born of woman, would come to crush the serpent and the power of sin, that is, death.

Sin would indeed bear its putrid fruit in this life. Adam would labor to eat and Eve would have pain in labor. Their years would now be numbered. Relationships would damage easier than heal. Their offspring would be engulfed in the sad struggle with the sinful flesh that this first sin inaugurated. But there would be an end to suffering, a renewal reflected dimly in this life and resplendent in the next. A new Paradise, a peace with God, a time when God's presence would once again bring delight and not terror would come, because Christ would come. And Christ has come, that Son whom the Father loved who loved Him back with all His being in our place, who trusted Him even in death. And that which was promised to your first parents is now your inheritance in Him. The bruised heel of His pierced foot has crushed the serpent's head, together with its power and threat: death.

The Father knows who you are and what you have done, and He seeks you, not in anger, but in love, even when you hide in shame and unbelief. Who can continue to hide from such love? Who can make excuses in the face of such patient compassion? Who can cast blame with such forgiveness is sown? You have sinned. You have sinned by your own fault, your own fault, your own most grievous fault. Own it. Confess it. Admit it. Because your Father longs to take it away. Amen.