

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

The Questions & Answers that Matter Most of All

Genesis 3:1-15

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹²The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵And 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.”

Today’s First Lesson comes from one of the more well-known accounts in the Bible, the temptation of Adam and Eve to “eat the apple.” The account actually hangs on five questions. Today I hope to show you how, even though they were first asked and answered in Eden, they remain the ones that matter most of all.

The first question is “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Ge 3:1). It’s diabolical. Both because the devil himself asked it and because of its phrasing. Not “Did God say?” but “Did God *really* say?”. It intends to cast doubt onto both God’s Word and Eve’s understanding of it. And then to quote back to her most all the words God had said, but with a subtle yet deadly twist. Pure evil genius.

This first question is still around today. Not, to get us to worship the devil but to cast doubt on God’s Word. “Did God really say?” prefaces pretty much every moral and doctrinal temptation. If we can’t be sure of what God speaks in favor of, then we also can’t be sure of what he’s against. And therefore, ... eventually ... pretty much anything goes.

But not a first, as Eve put up some resistance to Satan’s diabolical question. The problem was her defense included a half-truth. “The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” (3:2,3). Eve was right, God had told them they could eat from any tree in the garden except one. He didn’t say they’d die if they touched it. That part she added on her own. As you know, her half-truth was no match for Satan. Yours aren’t either. The “sword of the Spirit ... is the Word of God” (Ep 6:17), not what you think the Word maybe could mean, not what you think it should have said.

The second question asked in Eden wasn't diabolical. It was gracious. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "'Where are you?'" (3:8,9). The question isn't a threat, although the Creator had every right to be upset with creatures who had so brazenly disobeyed him and rejected his love. Instead it's an invitation. To come back to where they belonged. To repent and return to his loving embrace.

Now days, though, we often are the ones who ask God "Where are you?" While this is understandable at times – there are Psalms about this and the Book of Job too – other times it is brazen unbelief. Like when with willful intention or in disinterested ignorance we clothe ourselves with shame and guilt, and then we ask where are you Lord, why won't you come help me? To which he answers, I have come in the Seed of the Woman, Jesus Christ. Where are you? It's time to come back to where you belong. It's time for you to repent and return to my loving embrace. I haven't gone anywhere. I haven't changed. I'm the same gracious God who called out to Adam in the Garden of Eden, who calls out to you.

The third question in the account was also asked of the man by the Lord God. "He said, 'Who told you that you were naked?'" (3:11). Was it the one who formed you in my image and breathed into you the breath of life? Was it the one who set you over all creation as its crown and gave you the perfect partner and fulfilling purpose with which to enjoy it? Or was it someone else? Such a question certainly brought Adam and Eve to the full realization of what caused their downfall. They had foolishly listened to the lies of the devil instead of the word of their loving God.

Amidst the fallout of some of our sins we've each wondered, "What was I thinking?" Whatever it was, it wasn't about the God who made and saved and sanctifies me.

So, God had invited Adam to repent. And God had just demonstrated to him the foolishness of his sin. But guilt and shame and embarrassment hung thick in the cool air that evening. So to cut through them and work repentance in Adam, God asked the pointed question: "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (3:11). Yes or no? To which Adam at first tries to shift to the blame onto his wife and even onto God, but in the end admits, 'Yes,' "I ate it" (3:12).

That the Lord had come to restore the relationship, not end it, is also borne out by what happens next. "Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'" (3:13). Eve, too, is mercifully given the opportunity to admit her guilt by confessing the 'what' of her actions, which she also eventually does.

We should note carefully the exact wording of this final question. It's not the version we tend to ask and dwell on: "Why have you done this?" It's 'What have you done?' 'Why?' can still be answered from the bushes. Because of the shortcomings of my spouse or the between-a-rock-and-hard-place nature of my situation or the craftiness of the serpent. But "What?" requires us to admit our guilt without even a fig leaf of a self-justifying excuse.

Such a naked admission can be terrifying for us to make in our lives. It can be terrifying to hear. What? You don't love me as much as I thought? As much as I love you? The fallout from sin is never pretty. You can't just pretend it didn't happen and hope things go back to the way they were. Not when you've broken someone's heart. Not when you've violated someone's trust. Those relationships will never be the same. And so, we tend to dwell on why.

But not God. He's not afraid of the what because he's eager to forgive and move on. Already in Eden he promised the Woman's Seed would save us and on Calvary's cross and Easter's empty tomb, Jesus kept that promise. Sure, there might be temporal consequences to our sin, there were for Adam and Eve, but he remains committed to his relationship with us and will provide all we need to carry on in him even if "outwardly we are wasting away" (Second Lesson, 2 Co 4:16).

So, what's God doing in the world now days? What's he doing in your life? The same thing he's done since that day in the Garden. He's calling to each of us to come back to him. So out of the bushes. You have no need to hide behind excuses caused by your own guilt and shame. You have every reason in the world, - and in what comes after this world to confess it all and to embrace the relationship with God the Woman's Seed has come to restore.

That's why the questions and answers in Eden still matter most of all.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

M: O God, the strength of all who trust in you, mercifully hear our prayers. Be gracious to us and give us strength to keep your commandments in all we say and do; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C:  **Amen.**

Prayers of the Church

M: O Creator of all things. You rule in judgment and mercy. And yet we are tempted to disobey your Word.

When we fall call us to repentance.

When we hide ourselves in shame seek us out in love and restore us in the relationship you have made with us.

Grant us the fullness of your forgiveness, that as one people, united by your grace, we may stand on account of the Seed of the Woman against the lies of the devil and powers of evil.

Special requests

- Receive our thanks, O Lord, for carrying little **Ezrah Eggert** in your arms during his surgery on Wednesday. We praise you for how you keep him close to your heart. Grant swift recovery and continued growth and strength to this little lamb of yours.
- Nancy Wright, home from the hospital.
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Finally, we ask that those who here receive the Savior's body and blood in the Sacrament would be assured of the forgiveness of their sins, be strengthened in the resisting of temptation, and be enabled for service in his kingdom until finally they enjoy the glories of the life that has no end. Amen.

Lord's Prayer