

Pentecost 3 – June 9, 2024
Text: Genesis 3:8-15
Theme: The Promise Is Eternal

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

And so, it was many millennia ago when the ancient serpent led God’s beautiful creation to sin against him and therefore abdicate the image of God and their rightful place in paradise.

The man must toil for a living, fighting to provide and never feeling as though he has provided enough. Work is a gift from God. Human beings were created for meaningful work. That’s why people who are idle either get into trouble or become depressed. We were not created to be idle. But now work is toil for the man. Whatever our responsibilities in life, we struggle with the idea of being free and self-centered. The stronger our faith the more we prevail in the struggle to love our wives and children above ourselves, but I suspect the struggle will not end until judgment day.

The woman must bring forth children in pain and because she was the man’s helper and led the man to sin, she will always desire the headship that she may never have. Although I am clearly not a

woman, it has been my observation that women struggle with submitting to men. Because men are sinful and imperfect, the natural desire is to take over and do the job right. Only the woman who is strong in faith can find the strength to back away and encourage men to lead instead of just taking over.

And the serpent. What of him? God does not always share with us the particulars of how he will deal with our enemies, but this time he does. We are given the gift of hearing the punishment for that ancient angel who had turned against our God and been cast out of glory by the Archangel Michael and the host of heaven. Why do you think God would allow us to be privy to the punishment of another creature?

It is because in the pronouncement of God's wrath against the serpent, we hear the promise of our own salvation.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

The serpent knew from that moment on that when a baby boy was born to God's people, it might be the one who would destroy him. And Jesus came, born of Mary, a descendant of King David

himself on both sides. The fury of Hell was released upon the earth as the King of Kings came to his rightful throne.

God's people had clung to the promise for generation upon generation. Now it was fulfilled before their very eyes. All people forgiven for all sin by the death of the one who bruised Satan's head. Satan bruised his heel. It was death on the cross and damnation, but that bruise bought freedom for all God's people and the resurrection of Christ crushed Satan's head. He could not hold God in Hell. Even after all those millennia, he still had not learned that he was not as powerful as God.

So now, the gift has been given and the only way to go to Hell is to refuse the gift. It is yours. Jesus said from the cross,

"It is finished." Only by refusing that which has been given to you, only by negating the eternal promise and refusing God can you choose Hell. So, what does this mean for us?

Well first it means that it is harder to go to Hell than many Christians believe. Jonathan Edwards, the famous Puritan preacher said that we hang like a spider from a single thread over the fiery pits of Hell! But that is simply not true. We are very secure in our salvation. Jesus has done all the work and we are free to live lives on this earth and not be fearful. I have absolutely no fear of going

to Hell and it has nothing to do with the kind of life I have lived or the choices I have made. It has only to do with the fact that God fulfilled His eternal promise. Jesus crushed Satan's head and paid for me to go to heaven when I die and to be resurrected to eternal life on the last day.

The second thing this means is that we have a lot more in common with our Christian brothers and sisters that we have different. Now don't get me wrong. I love our worship and our theology and I believe that we have it as close or closer than anyone else when it comes to Biblical truth and accuracy. But the reality is that our ticket to paradise was a gift. We did not earn it by being true to the Scriptures and faithful in our practice of the Sacraments. The people of St. Alexander's across the street got their tickets from the same place we did. The people over at St. Paul's ELCA got their tickets from the same place as well. We all get into paradise the same way.

Our denomination within Christianity is our preferred way of connecting with the God of the Universe and expressing our faith in him. Our denomination is important. We do what we do because we are trying to remain faithful and true to our understanding of God. But never forget that it is OUR understanding and we are attempting to understand someone who is incomprehensible.

The promise is the same for all Christians. The promise is eternal for all Christians. On the great and glorious day of the resurrection, our eyes will be fully opened and we will understand much more than we do now. We will no longer be divided by church signs and worship styles. We will be one family of God worshipping the one true God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with everyone we love for all eternity.

The promise is eternal. It was made in the Garden of Eden and fulfilled on the cross. Now we wait for the day when we will receive our inheritance. We have God's Word and Sacraments to keep us strong and faithful as we wait and we remain focused on the prize that is already ours.

I'm reminded of Christmas 1973. All I wanted was a new Huffy bike with a banana seat. About December 15, a large oddly wrapped package was leaning against the wall behind the tree. It could be nothing other than my new bike. I remember those 10 days like it was yesterday – checking the living room morning, noon, and night to look at that package and dream of what it was going to be like. Because of my father's superior wrapping job, I could see into the package and I knew that it was even the right color. My bike was purchased and, in the house, and in just a short time, I would be out riding it all over town, so nothing bothered me. I didn't care if my

brothers picked on me. I didn't care if I didn't get to watch my favorite TV show, Gunsmoke, because my parents had to watch the Perry Como Christmas Special. Nothing bothered me...because I knew that the gift I had been promised had been delivered and I only had to wait a little while until it was fully mine. It is the same for us with regard to our eternal life in paradise. The gift is purchased. It is ours. We now only wait to receive it.