

Lent 1 Year A February 26 2023 Genesis 2 15-17 3 1-7 Matthew 4 1-11

The church finds itself at the start of another holy season of Lent. It seems only appropriate then, that our first reading be from Genesis. If we are at the beginning, let us start at the beginning.

The scene before us today is a familiar one. Eve and Adam are in paradise, without any cares, or worries. God has set them in his garden, where all of their needs are met.

But, something comes slithering into their lives. A serpent, with enticing words on its tongue. A seed of disobedience, of desire, is planted in their minds.

Eve looks, and this tree, with its fruit that has been forbidden from her, begins to look desirable.

Despite all that She and Adam have, despite all that God has blessed them both with, she desires more.

This leads to disobedience – a breaking with the will of God. And it is this disobedience, this breaking with what God wants for them, that plunges, not only Eve and Adam out of the garden, but leads to humanity's fall.

One of the things that I find so gripping about this story, is its scale. It is both small and large. It is particular in its details, and universal in its impact.

A story about two people, is also a story about all of us. A story about one sin, is a story about all of our sins.

It becomes clear that this story is bigger than me. It is bigger than you. It is bigger than all of us here right now. It encompasses all of us, all of humanity.

Sin is what connects us to this story. The Sin that Eve and Adam did, and the sins that we do. This story seems to be telling us, that we are bound together by sin.

Maybe it is the last two years of the pandemic, but I cannot help but think of sin as a virus. It has an entry point into the world, and then quickly starts to spread. Branching out in countless directions.

Sin is an insidious virus; it changes, adapts, and mutates to its surroundings and to its host.

It gets passed on, one person to another, one community to another, one generation to another.

And so, it becomes this thing we all share, that we are bound up in, that is larger than all of us. A virus of – a pandemic of sin.

Sin's symptoms are many, and never affects only the sinner.

Greed is one symptom. It causes us to hoard what we have. To desire more than what we need. It causes us to take from others, of denying those in need. It sets person against person – as combatants fighting over material goods.

This gets passed on. Some learn greed's ways, becoming experts at accumulating things for themselves. Others fall victim to scarcity, always trying to

scrape by. Relationships get distorted and corrupted when they are based on taking from others. Greed has us bound in sin.

Pride is another symptom. We want recognition, we want respect, we want appreciation. It convinces us that we have no limitations, that we can do and achieve anything. It becomes harder and harder for us to recognize when we are in need, and when we need help. We are blind to the needs of others, unless some glory is in it for us. Relationships get distorted and corrupted when they become one-sided. Pride has us bound in sin.

Wrath is another. When we have been mistreated; when our friends, our family, our co-workers, our neighbors, when the world has hurt us, done us wrong; wrath begins to boil in us. It is like a fever, and it clouds all of our thoughts and feelings.

The only way, we believe, to break the fever, is to punish, to punish those who have wronged us. Relationships get distorted and corrupted when they are about exacting revenge. Wrath has us bound in sin.

Sin takes on so many forms. It warps our relationships with one another, it harms our relationship with God.

We never seem to cure ourselves of it, because we pass it back and forth, back and forth.

*You* cannot separate yourself from *my* sin. And *I* cannot separate myself from *your* sin.

If the story were to end there, it would all seem rather hopeless.

But our reading from Matthew is given as a counterpoint to Genesis.

Jesus is not in the garden, but in the wilderness. In the garden, every need is met – here, in the desert, he must fast to survive. The cunning serpent is now played by Satan, who in the original Greek goes by many names. The Tempter. The Slanderer. The Accuser.

The Tempter tries to infect Jesus with sin, with that same sin that infected Eve and Adam. The Slanderer tries to plant defiance in the heart of Jesus. The Accuser tries to coerce Jesus, to seek and exert his will on the world, breaking with the will of God. Seeking his own glory, instead of seeking God's.

Christ rejects this disobedience. He rejects the temptation to change the stones into bread. Likewise, he refuses to jump from the temple, or bow down to Satan.

He refuses to satisfy his needs, and his needs alone. He rejects the popularity, fame, and glory offered atop the mountain.

Instead, Jesus sets his will towards feasting on the word of God. He sets his will towards worshiping God alone. His will is God's will. He wants what God wants.

Just like in Genesis, one of the things that I find so gripping about this story, is its scale. It is both small and large. It is particular in its details, and universal in its impact. A story about one man, is a story about all of us. A story about one man's dedication to God, is a story about our redemption.

It becomes clear that this story is bigger than me. It is bigger than you. It is bigger than all of us here right now. It encompasses all of us, all of humanity.

*Grace* is what connects us to this story. The grace that is to be found and known in the person of Jesus Christ.

In loving as he loves.

In serving as he serves.

In seeking out and following the will of God as he does.

Grace is an amazing vaccine. It has no expiration, knows no limits, and knows no boundaries.

It is available for everyone. Offered to everyone as a gift. Grace is the cure to sin.

It can be shared, one person to another, one community to another, one generation to another.

This is one of the amazing gifts of Lent. It affords us the opportunity, to look with sober eyes at ourselves, and at the world. To admit, that we are caught up in sin and bound by it.

Lent is not about wallowing in that fact – about surrendering ourselves over to this fallen world.

It is about recognizing that there is a way to break the shackles of sin.

Jesus seeks to free us from this cycle, and unite us together in Grace.

Instead of greed, pride, wrath, hate, fear; the countless way we degrade and debase ourselves, one another, and God; instead Jesus is offering us self-respect, mutual affection, compassion, empathy, peace, endless and boundless love.

Seek Jesus, and what you will discover is Grace upon Grace. And what you will discover in Jesus, is redemption.

A new story, not of disobedience, but one of grace will be written. New bonds, not of sin, but of love will be forged. Amen.