

**March 5, 2017**  
**Temptation, Forgiveness and Salvation**  
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11  
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
Gracia y paz de dios del Padre, Hijo, y Espiritu Santo  
Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The synagogue was dark. The lighted sign near the sidewalk announced Friday services. The Shabbat service had ended around 9pm. The congregation had dispersed, gone to their homes to celebrate the day of rest. It was near 11pm when three 13-year-old gentile boys were wandering through the neighborhood.

Bored, unsupervised, looking for excitement they noticed the script on the sign. "What is this?" one of the boys asked the others. "It's not in English. Let's teach them a lesson about being American!" The boys gathered cans of spray paint, returned to the synagogue and covered the sign in swastikas. One of the boys stood to the side, watching his buddies desecrate the property. Before they had finished their mission a squad car pulled up to the curb and all three were arrested.

You look shocked! What shocks you the most? That the boys were only 13? That they were wandering alone at that hour? That they spray-painted a sign? That they painted swastikas on the property of a Jewish house of worship?

All of this should shock us. We are assaulted by acts of hate on a daily basis. Have we become so used to these acts that we don't notice the multiple layers of sin in each act?

The gospel reading for the First Sunday in Lent is always one of the accounts of the temptation of Jesus. This year we hear the first Evangelist's report coupled with the temptation and disobedience of the first humans. The two stories are remarkably similar while they stand in stark contrast to one another.

We are so familiar with both of these stories that we often overlook the details. Details that hold important lessons for daily living as disciples of Jesus. Taking a closer look at this second creation story and the "fall" story we encounter surprising truths.

Set aside the more familiar creation story of Genesis One. The account of creation is different in Genesis Two. God created the earth and the heavens and then God formed *adam* (man) from *adamah* (dust). God breathed into *adam*'s nostrils the breath of life, and *adam* became a living being. Created, not only in the image of God, *adam* is brought to life by the very breath of God. God is intimately involved with and invested in the creature. God has prepared a beautiful living space for the creature. God has provided meaningful work for the creature. God has provided all that the creature needs. Including a partner to share in the joyful work that God has provided. There is a covenant relationship, a promise between God and the creatures. "You have everything you need. Even this extravagantly beautiful tree here in the middle of the garden. Its blossoms are sweet to smell, but it is for your visual enjoyment only. God tells the creatures "you may touch only with your eyes". The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not for the creature's consumption.

God gives no further explanation. God expects the creatures to obey. They have everything they need surrounding that tree. All seems to go well for a time. The creatures go about their days in comfort and with plenty.

Then it goes badly. The serpent, the craftiest of beasts engages the one of the creatures in a conversation. "Hey, how are you? Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden?'"

“Well, no”, Eve answers “God said we could eat from any of the trees, and plants just not that one in the middle of the garden. In fact, we are not even to touch it or we will die!”. (That’s NOT what God said, Eve added that no touching part.) “Humph!” the serpent answers. “That’s pretty interesting because that tree will give you all knowledge. I wonder why God doesn’t want you to know good and evil. That seems like a useful skill to have. Besides, the fruit is really tasty.”

The result of a seemingly innocent conversation? The creatures are enticed to disobey the command of God. And the consequences are staggering.

What used to be joyous work for Adam is now fraught with hardship, sweat and aching muscles. Childbirth that was once natural is now painful and frightening. Every time the creatures see the dust of the ground, they are reminded of their mortality.

AND God remains with them through it. The creatures previously had one job, to enjoy the gift of life in the beautiful garden God had provided for them. Now, because they listened to and followed the advice of a voice other than God’s, their job is a constant struggle.

Jesus, too heard competing voices as he fasted in the wilderness. The first voice was the voice of God the Father at his baptism: “You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased”. The water of baptism was barely dry when Jesus heard another voice. A voice that started a simple conversation saying “If you are the Son of God, prove it. You’re famished. You can turn these stones into bread and satisfy your hunger. No big deal. “No? You won’t do that? How about you prove how great God is by jumping off this tower? God promised in Psalm 91 that angels will catch you.

No? You’re not going to test God? How would you like to reign over all the empires of the world? I can make that happen. You just have to worship me”. We face these same temptations or tests every day. Really we do! Think about it. We are tempted to over-indulge on food when there are many who have no bread. We test our physical well-being by that over-indulgence and lack of exercise. We labor long and hard to gain material wealth, often at the expense of others.

It is easy to convince ourselves that we can withstand temptation on our own. If Satan assaulted me I could argue from my superior knowledge of good and evil. “I don’t have to prove anything to you, Satan. I know who you are. I am far too smart to fall for your enticing lies.” Or I might succumb to the temptation just to prove that I have God on my side. “Ha! Satan, see I CAN turn stones into bread. God likes me better than God likes you.” Neither of these choices seems satisfactory, and with good reason. How, then are we to fight against the serpents that assail us daily?

Listen to Jesus. How does he respond to each test? Jesus, truly human and fully God does not rely on his own strength or wisdom. Jesus relies on the history of God’s faithfulness. Jesus relies on who he knows God to be, who we know God to be, merciful and just and, well GOD!

Those 13 year-old boys heard the voice of the serpent that dark, Friday evening. They chose to rely on their own knowledge and understanding when they defaced a holy place with symbols of hate. They paid a price for their action, a civil price. And, though they don’t know it, someone else paid a much higher price for their sin. Their sin and ours is forgiven and erased because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the walk of Lent. Walking in the garden the Creator has prepared. Surrendering our pride and hate, laying them at the foot of the cross where we receive God’s astonishing mercy.

Thanks be to God!