

March 5, 2017

*Romans 5:12-19:*

***“From Jesus to Us ... Righteousness”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If you were here in church this past Ash Wednesday, you heard the words spoken to Adam, the father of us all: “you are dust and to dust you shall return.” We heard those brutal words again in our Old Testament lesson for this morning. When Adam fell into sin, he not only put himself under condemnation and plunged into death; he brought all humanity with him. From God’s perspective, it doesn’t matter who would have been in the garden, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).” And “the soul who sins shall die (Ezek. 18:20).” And we need to understand that such a death is not simply the last event of our biological life; it is the shadow that casts itself over every step of our journey from the cradle to the grave.

In his book *Death and Life*, Helmut Thielicke explains that death moves out of its “chronological confinement” and leaves its imprint on all of our days. It is not that Adam physically dropped dead after eating the fruit he had been forbidden to eat, but he did die. His sin put him and us under a divine death sentence. All of his days were lived in the presence of death and he died. So it is with us.

Our sermon hymn for today, *All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall*, was written by Lazarus Spengler. Most Lutherans have no idea who he was. In modern language, he was a very important person. He was the leader of the Reformation in Nuremberg and a close friend of Luther - so close that he was named with Luther in the same papal bull of excommunication in 1521. He was a delegate to both the diets of Worms and Augsburg. It was Spengler who sent Luther a drawing that would later become “Luther’s rose.”

But, there’s more. His hymn was so highly regarded during the Reformation era that it was cited twice in the *Formula of Concord*. Here is one of the citations:

Likewise, we also reject and condemn those who teach that, though man’s nature has been greatly weakened and corrupted through the Fall, it has nevertheless not entirely lost all the goodness that belongs to spiritual and divine matters, or that the situation is not the way the hymn which we sing in our churches describes it, “Through Adam’s fall man’s nature and being are wholly corrupted,” but that human nature has of and from man’s natural birth something that is good - even though in only a small, limited, and poor degree - such as the faculty, aptitude, skill, or ability to initiate and effect something in spiritual matters or to cooperate therein (SD I 23).

Sin and death are devastating. They are a prison from which no one can escape. We confess to God “that we are by nature sinful and unclean . . . in thought, word, and deed” but we can hardly grasp the gravity of the situation. Luther once correctly said that we are “curved in toward ourselves,” which means that whatever we think, say and do is full of self love and misses the mark of the true love of God. Jeremiah writes (17:9), “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” And our Lord Jesus remarks, “from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:20-23).”

In his hymn, Lazarus Spengler not only dug into the depths of what sin is and what it has done, but he was able to just as powerfully write about the wonders of God's mercy and salvation through Jesus Christ. In stanzas four and five, we read: "4 But Christ, the second Adam, came To bear our sin and woe and shame, To be our life, our light, our way, Our only hope, our only stay. 5 As by one man all mankind fell And, born in sin, was doomed to hell, So by one Man, who took our place, We all were justified by grace." These words are pointing to our epistle lesson for this morning. Adam is identified as a "type" of the one who was to come (that is, Christ) in that he stands at the head of human history and by his sin has determined the dark and fatal course of that history. Paul says:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned - for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

We are all too familiar with Adam's destiny - trespass, wrath, and death. But the apostle Paul testifies to another destiny - the destiny of the one man Christ Jesus who is righteousness, grace, and life! Paul goes on to say, "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many." **From Jesus to Us . . . Righteousness!** That's our theme for this first Sunday in Lent. Jesus is the second Adam, but he is entirely different from the first. While Adam stands at the head of human history, Jesus turns human history upside down and does what Adam failed to do. Jesus does everything right and takes the darkness unto himself in order to give us light in the face of God! Our destination is restored as God intended from the very beginning! Rev. John T. Pless writes:

Adam stands at the head of humanity, turned against God and turned in on himself . . . United to Adam, we share his fate, were it not for the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6). He is the one who has purchased and won all of Adam's children, not with gold or silver, but with his own blood. Indeed the gift is not like the trespass, for in Christ there is grace upon grace, blessing piled upon blessing! In Christ, there is an abundance of mercy, which covers our trespasses.

Israel is known for two main bodies of water. In the north there is the Sea of Galilee, which is really a lake that is 13 miles long and 7.5 miles wide. Fishing is big in the Sea of Galilee because there are over 22 different kinds of fish. There is also vegetation and fruit on the shore. It is a beautiful body of water.

Now, 60 miles to the south is the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is 47 miles long and 9.5 miles wide. It is the lowest point on the entire earth. Everyday two million gallons of water flow into the Dead Sea, but none of the water goes out. Amazingly, the Dead Sea contains 30 grams of salt per liter. Consequently, no one has ever drowned in it. There is so much salt and so many minerals that one just floats. Also, there is no life or vegetation. Even the shore is barren. Tumbleweed are the only thing you find.

These two bodies of water provide a very stark contrast between that which is brimming with life and that which is exuding nothing but death. The physical geography of Israel is a portrait of the spiritual reality of humanity. Just as there is one sea that continually breathes life and fruitfulness, there is another sea that breathes death and uselessness. In the same way, there are two classes of people: the person who is in Adam and the person who is in Christ. Of all the people who have ever lived, these two men stand out from the rest of humanity. As representative men, all of human history revolves around them.

In our epistle lesson, Paul wants to compare and contrast the work of Adam with Jesus Christ so that we understand that what Jesus did was far greater than what Adam did. That's the whole message of these verses, in a nutshell. Our entire position is changed. **From Jesus to Us . . . Righteousness!** We used to be "in Adam," but now we are "in Christ." This is HUGE! It is no wonder then that like our epistle lesson for this morning, our sermon hymn ended in what is called a doxology - an expression of praise. "6 We thank You, Christ; new life is ours, New light, new hope, new strength, new pow'rs. This grace our ev'ry way attend Until we reach our journey's end." Indeed! **From Jesus to Us . . . Righteousness!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott