

Genesis 2:15-17; Luke 23:35-43 - “Paradise Lost and Restored”

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Midweek Lent 2022 - Jesus' Words From the Cross - Pt. III

Our theme for this evening, based on our OT reading and Jesus' words from the cross in our Gospel reading is “Paradise Lost and Restored.” As we heard in Genesis, after the creation of all things, Adam and Eve were enjoying life together in paradise! Everything was working together in perfect harmony, their relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation. We also heard that after God created Adam, He entrusted him with the care of God's creation, which included his wife, Eve (created from Adam's rib) and their children (who had yet to be born). This care of Eve and their future children included sharing God's Word with them.

When the devil, in the form of a serpent, tempted Eve to question what God had told Adam about not eating from “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,*” it's obvious that Adam had shared this word of God with Eve.” But what also becomes obvious is our need to remain connected to God's word by reading it and sharing it with others throughout our lives.

When the devil spoke his first lie to Eve about not eating “*of any tree in the garden,*” Eve at first corrected the devil's lie by saying: “*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden.’*” But then she added to God's word by saying, “*neither shall you touch it, lest you die.*”

At this point it was obvious that the devil's sinful lie had already conceived sin in the heart of Eve, which would then give birth to her sinful action of eating the forbidden fruit (James 1:15). But she was not alone! We're told that after “*she took of its fruit and ate...she also gave some to her husband **who was with her,** and he ate.*” Adam's silence, especially in not correcting Eve's lie about touching the forbidden fruit, also revealed the break in the original harmony that God had created between mankind and Himself. The devil's sinful lie had conceived sin in both Eve and Adam.

Their failure to trust in God and His word left them to their own devices and their further separation from God and each other using fig leaves. Notice also that (as Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller points out in his book, [A Martyr's Faith in a Faithless World](#)) Adam and Eve were hiding from God, and with the devil. They were at peace with the devil and at war with God. But God immediately turns that back around by putting “*enmity*” or war between the devil's offspring, referring to the now sinful nature of Adam and Eve and their children which the devil had conceived in their hearts, and the woman's offspring, referring to the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, who would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, and who would win that war for us all by crushing the head of Satan.

No doubt the Savior was conceived in the hearts of Adam and Eve through faith when they heard this Good News, but before Adam and Eve would leave this world and enter paradise restored, they had a lot of explaining to do for their children, who would not be born in paradise but in this fallen world. To Adam and Eve's children this fallen world would seem normal. So also would their sinful desires. They wouldn't know of anything better. Therefore, Adam and Eve would need to explain to them not only about sin and its effect (paradise lost), but also about God's promise of salvation (paradise restored)—the Law and the Gospel.

This becomes the responsibility of Adam and Eve's children as well; to care for the children of every generation through the proclamation of God's word. When some forget or fail to do that, like Adam, it's up to us, who remember, to share God's word with people even beyond our own families. For it's through God's word that He restores people to paradise.

But before paradise could be completely restored in the new heaven and earth, sin had to be destroyed through death. That's why the Son of God became flesh, to not only proclaim God's word but to fulfill it. So we "Go to dark Gethsemane" (LSB 436) and to the cross to hear Jesus' words from the cross.

As Jesus hung on the cross, He certainly didn't look like the Son of God or the Restorer of paradise. The sinless Son of God was stripped of all the fig leaves (which sinful man uses to hid his shame) and nailed to a cross. As I mentioned last Sunday, Jesus' death on a cross points to the full effect of our sins, a damning death. Jesus was not only rejected by the crowd and the religious leaders and abandoned by His disciples, but He was also "*forsaken*" by His heavenly Father. Jesus didn't even save Himself by coming down from the cross. It certainly appeared as if Jesus was a fake, and getting what He deserved.

But then, just when it appeared that no one was willing to come to Jesus' defense and bear witness to the truth, the words of a thief bore witness to all people. To the other criminal who was hurling insults at Jesus, this thief said: "*Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.*" Then he turned to his Savior and said: "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*"

This is an amazing confession of faith. This man believed that he himself was a sinner who was getting what he deserved—death on a tree which pointed to a damning death (Deuteronomy 21:23). He also believed that Jesus was not a sinner—that He had "*done nothing wrong,*" and that Jesus would live after His death and come into His kingdom. So this thief reached out to Jesus for salvation.

Where did this thief get such an incredible faith? Not from the words of the religious leaders who were saying that Jesus was a blasphemer; not from the general public or Roman soldiers who hurled insults on Jesus and nailed Him to a cross; not even from Jesus' closest disciples who were either nowhere to be seen or standing there in silence. The thief would have received his amazing faith through the words of the Word of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, as He hung there beside him (which we heard over the past two Wednesdays). Jesus not only spoke words of love and concern for His mother, "*Woman, behold, your son.*" and to His disciple, John, "*Behold, your mother,*" but He also spoke words of love and concern for those who were crucifying Him: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Lk 23:34; Jn 19:25-27).

By the grace and power of God's word, the thief made the good confession of faith about Jesus Christ. So in a very real sense, Jesus was actually speaking through the thief, even though we don't consider the thief's words to be the word's of Jesus. Through the thief's words, it was obvious that the Spirit of God was at work through the words that Jesus spoke earlier to create saving faith in this thief.

Jesus confirmed this Good News by telling this thief—this now sinner/saint—"*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.*" By the amazing grace of God, paradise had been restored for this thief, not by any good works he had done in this life. He had no chance to even lift a finger for the good of others. He was saved by God's grace through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. This gracious gift of faith resulted in the thief confessing his faith, speaking back to God and all people after him, the main teachings of God's word: that we are condemned sinners in need of a Savior, and that Jesus Christ is our Savior.

Through our God given faith in this Good News we too seek to confess our faith to the world around us, and in the end we too will be with Jesus and the thief in paradise. "*For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved*" (Romans 10:10). All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.