

Sermon Transcript for the First Sunday in Lent, February 21, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have some classic readings here. We obviously, in our Old Testament lesson, have the lesson and the description of humanity's fall into sin. And the serpent being Satan himself, either taking on the form of a serpent or possessing a serpent, we're not completely certain there, came and spoke to Eve, and deceived her. He said much of what God said, but not quite in the right way. He calls to Eve and he says, "Did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?" No, of course not. God did not say that. So already Satan is trying to sound like he knows what he's talking about, but kind of push Eve to question the words, maybe make up her own words, which indeed she did. She said, "God said we could eat of all the trees of the garden, except the tree in the middle of the garden, of that we should not eat, nor shall we touch it, lest we die." Now, Satan knew he had already won probably at that point, because Eve had taken the words that she had heard that God had said, and had expanded them just a little bit. Now, the problem is, Adam was obviously right there, because as soon as she ate the fruit, she gave some to him. He ate it as well. His job was he was supposed to communicate to Eve exactly what God had said, because he was there first. And he heard Eve talking to Satan, to the serpent, and he did not correct her. He did not say, "Well, no. Wait a second. That's not what God said. He said, do not eat the fruit." Now it makes sense if you don't touch the fruit, you're not going to eat the fruit. So it makes sense logically. But that's the same logic that the Pharisees applied to the regulations and rules that they made and to the point where, okay, if it says this, then we need to go five steps further. And therefore, we can guarantee that we won't get into problems. One prime example is the second commandment, do not misuse the name of the Lord, your God. Well, the implication is, there is a way to use the name of God properly, and there's a way to misuse it. So don't misuse it, but use it properly. Well, in the same logical fashion that Eve said, "Okay. If I don't eat it and if I don't touch it, I could surely not eat it." Same thing with the Pharisees. "If I don't say the name, surely I can't misuse the name." And they used their logic, their human reason to try to explain away something that they did not have a full understanding of. God wants us to use His name. He calls us, He begs us to call upon Him and use His name. And so to refuse to use His name, is actually far worse than misusing it because you're refusing to actually believe the Word of God. So we do this all the time. We try and define our own actions, and abilities, and thoughts, according to our own reason, and say, "Surely that's not really that bad. Or if I go this far, then, I can guarantee that I won't fall into sin." But we flip over on the other side and we fall into pride and arrogance. "Well, I don't do those things, so obviously I'm better. I'm good. I'm holy and righteous." Or, "I do these things which prove...", all of which are just fake righteousness. We are called to be humble before God, to admit our sin, which in the story of Adam and Eve, Adam did not admit his sin at first. He blamed God, "The woman that You gave me, she gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Whereas Eve said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate of it." She flat out confessed what she had done. And there are curses as a result of it. The labor, the childbirth labor and the working of the land and the toil, and the struggle that is our work, our daily grind, all of that is a result of this.

But even in the midst of all of this, God has mercy on us and He loves us. The first thing He does is He does judge, and He does tell them that because they ate of the fruit, they will die. They're going to have pain in childbirth. They're going to have to labor. There's going to be enmity between man and woman. There's going to be strife amongst people. All of these things are true. So He laid down the law, and it was a harsh law, it was. But He also offered grace as well. Grace in that, He covered their nakedness. He covered that which caused them to remember their sin. They hid because they realized they were naked. And when they realized they were naked, they realized that they suddenly knew what was good and evil, right and wrong. And to be naked with one another with sin and lust in their hearts, was wrong. And it's a symbol of all of our sins, that we are naked and exposed before God. And so He covers us. He covered Adam and Eve with lamb skin, with the skin of a sheep, the first sacrifice of an animal in the place of humanity. A pattern that

would be repeated over and over and over again in the Old Testament, as sacrifice after sacrifice, after sacrifice was given for sin upon sin, upon sin. And all of this, because we desired to be like God, to know good and evil. And what we did also [was] to try to define what is good and evil in our own eyes. And all of those sacrifices were to lead up, and to guide us to this one high priest who knows our weaknesses, who has been tempted in every way like us, and yet has done it without sin. So that's what the Hebrews says. The high priest was the one who offered the sacrifices for sins once a year, on that Day of Atonement where the sins of the people were placed upon the lamb, and it was slaughtered for their sake, and cut to cover the sins of that year. So that high priest is a symbol and a sign of a greater high priest who was going to come. And that is Jesus Christ, who was not just the priest who offers the sacrifice, but He is the sacrifice Himself. And so He has gone through heaven. He knows the plan of God. He is God Himself. His sacrifice will not just cover the nakedness and the exposure of sin that we have before God, but it will wipe it out. And that is the hope that we have.

Now, when Jesus begins His ministry, He's baptized and He takes upon the mantle of all humanity in His baptism to fulfill all righteousness, not all righteousness for Him, but all righteousness for us. And immediately following that, He is driven out into the desert to be tempted. And these are real temptations. I mean, fast for 40 days and 40 nights, and you too will be hungry. I can guarantee it. A lot of us, if we fast for one meal, if we skip a meal, we're hungry by later on in the day. Imagine 40 days without eating. So yes, of course, Jesus was hungry. And it would be natural, knowing that He could turn stones to bread, to eat it. Yet Jesus defends all of the temptations of Satan, not by a strength or will or character necessarily, but by the Word of God. And that is how we too face our temptations and our trials, or are called to. Face them with the Word of God, turn to the Word of God, focus on the Word of God, because that is where our hope lies. And that is where His promises are. And that is where we have been forgiven. And so Jesus constantly responds to Satan with the Word of God. Satan, the second time around, tries to bring in Scripture itself and take it out of context, and try to apply it to Jesus, and say that He should throw Himself off so He could demonstrate to the nation that He is the miracle worker and that He is truly protected by God. It would be a fast and quick and easy way to show His power to the people. And it might make them more readily able to listen to Him, and more excited about His ministry. At least that was what Satan was trying to hint at. Jesus knew that the quick and easy route, was not the right way. He had to walk the path that we walk. He had to be tempted. He had to struggle. He had to face hardship and trial, so that He might overcome it all for us. And then finally, the last one. Satan takes Him up on the high mountain, shows Him the nations and says, "All you got to do is bow down to me, and they are Yours." Now, notice Jesus didn't contradict him, and say, "Well, these nations are not yours." Satan is the ruler of this world. All nations are under the influence and control of Satan. And yet God, in His mercy, still provides leaders who provide peace and security to those who trust in Him and do what is right. Now, some of them are flawed, yes, but they are still a gift from God. And so we pray for our leaders that they might be godly, that they might live up to the vocation that God has given to them. And we thank God that He is still, even though the nations are influenced and Satan has control, that God still intervenes in them as well through His Word. Again, this was a quick and easy route. If He'd just bowed down one simple step, and all the glory and majesty and might and control was His, people all throughout the world would know Him and would be controlled by Him and under His authority. Basically, Satan did say, "Look, you really don't want to go through this trial and beating and flogging and mocking and being crucified and dying. I mean, come on. Really? That does not sound like a very good plan. And it sounds really painful. Why don't you take the easy route? It'd be much better." But again, Jesus confronts him with the Word of God. He says, "You shall worship the Lord, your God alone, and Him alone." And so, He takes the Word of God as His defense. The Word of God is our defense, the only defense that we have.

So you can also see later on when Peter tries to tell Jesus that He really doesn't want to go and be crucified and die, you can hear Jesus saying, "Peter, that is exactly what Satan tried to tell me way back at the

beginning." So He says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." Telling Peter, "Look, Satan's already done this. You don't need to join his crowd and join his crew. You are called to be my disciples. So get behind me, Satan. These words are not from God, as your previous words were. They are from Satan." So we can see that connection, and we can hear that. So again, we're connecting Advent all the way through here into Lent again. It's all about what is going to happen in these next 40 days, as we move forward to that last week, that Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.

During this season of Lent, we are called to be a little more serious, a little more somber, a little more thoughtful in our devotion, in our prayer, and in fasting, and in our confession. This is an opportunity for us to learn what it means to be a sinner in the hands of God. Not in the hands of an angry God, but in the hands of a gracious and merciful God, who loves us, whose abundant love is beyond measure, who is gracious, who is prodigal, who is magnanimous in His gifts and giving abundantly more than we could possibly imagine. That is what we are to focus upon. And that is what we are to hold fast to. And thank God that while we are yet sinners, Christ came and died for us, and forgave us all of our sins. And in our Baptism, we are His children, and we are forgiven, and we are free. May that hold you firm this Lenten season as we move towards the Cross and the Resurrection.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.