

Genesis 3:8-15

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 13, 2021

Problems crop up in all relationships. We may deal with them in various ways. Some ignore the problems and hope they go away. (They usually don't.) We may emotionally break down and cry, looking for pity. Or we react with anger and explode. Then we retaliate or retort with bitterness to express our displeasure with threats or name-calling. These responses tend to escalate the conflict. Better is to address the situation rationally and come to a resolution.

In today's First Lesson, a problem had occurred for the first people and God. We see how he handled it as we look at the various characters involved.

#### GOD CONFRONTS SIN HEAD-ON

- I. Despite no merit in man
- II. No mercy for the serpent and Satan
- III. Seeking and saving grace from God

The Lord dealt with the first sin in human history despite there being no merit in man. Adam and Eve were the guilty sinners. God had created them with a marvelous body and placed them in wonderful surroundings, which supplied all their needs. They existed in harmony with the Lord and all his creatures as the crown of his creation. It was truly paradise in the Garden of Eden. The Lord made one request as an opportunity for man and woman to show appreciation to him. Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was in the center of the garden.

How long our first parents remained in their state of bliss we do not know. Its breakup came when they disobeyed. Satan used a serpent to question God's motives and promised great results if they followed his suggestion. Both Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree.

Then they experienced a dramatic change. There was a feeling of shame, so they covered their nakedness. When they realized God was present in the garden they felt fear, which prompted an attempt to hide from God. We might add stupidity to the results, as you can't hide from God. He knows and sees everything.

They also lied. Adam's reply to God's question of his whereabouts was, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." He was afraid, yes, but more was involved than a lack of clothing. Plus he recognized that his own efforts were

insufficient to do anything about his guilt. We can all relate to the feeling when you have been caught in the act of wrongdoing.

Adam played the blame game when God's question became more specific and inquired whether he had eaten of the forbidden tree. "The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'" It was her fault. What a contrast with the joy he had expressed when God presented her to him as helper and companion! But it was even worse. Did you note that he called her "the woman you put here with me?" Hey, God—it's really your fault. She was your idea. What audacity! How could he respond that way to God, who had done nothing but good for him? Only at the end did he slink in with, "And I ate it." He admitted the action but did not take responsibility for it, although he had not been force fed. He had chosen to join Eve in disobedience rather than to obey his Maker.

Eve did the same, essentially saying, "The devil made me do it." "The serpent deceived me," were her words. And where had he come from? God made him also. Hmm—more blame in the divine direction?

As you and I see our guilt, may we not follow them in directing blame elsewhere. Let us look at ourselves. How easy it is to find excuses in an attempt to deny or to shift the blame. Criminals blame their upbringing: it's their parents' fault. "I'm only human," so can't do any different. The child says, "He hit me first!" Couples at odds see all kinds of faults in the other spouse rather than take any responsibility for the problems. We have such good eyesight when we look for flaws in others but miss our own contribution. All those excuses, some of them perhaps having a degree of legitimacy, do not change the truth: we are sinful. We have disobeyed God again and again. We have no merit before him.

## II.

There was another key player involved as God confronted sin head-on. There was no mercy for the serpent and Satan. The serpent had been used by the devil to present the temptation to Eve. God said its means of movement would carry a message. "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life." Being on the ground would be a sign of defeat and humiliation. Dust wouldn't be its food but it couldn't help taking some in. We don't know anything about its previous locomotion. The account of Moses just deals with what we observe now and what it reminds us of. Was that edict not fair? There are other instances where creation suffers because of our sin. In the verses that follow God told Adam the ground was cursed, requiring hard work and sweat to yield a harvest. Paul wrote in Romans that creation was subjected to frustration. It cannot fulfill its designed purpose and yield to its potential. Animals were put to death for

harming a human even though they are not moral creatures. Those were among the effect of the crown of creation plunging into sin.

God had a bigger message for the user of the serpent, that is, for Satan. He had no opportunity for blessing or to return to service to God. He would encounter problems and defeat. We'll explore that more in a bit. He had made a choice. Satan was made as a holy angel, blessed to serve the Lord. However, he was not satisfied with his position so challenged God and led a rebellion of angels. The Lord defeated Satan and cast him and his followers out of heaven. Those angels not joining with him were established in righteousness. He and his minions remain forever out of favor with God. They are dedicated to opposing the Lord and his people.

We experience the temptations Satan brings. His tactics are the same used with Eve. Since they are so effective, why change? He works on us to doubt God and his goodness and his Word. "Did God really say...?" he challenged Eve. "You will be like God," he promised, appealing to vanity and implying God was holding something out from his creatures. As he desired, you can be equal to God. The Bible warns that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. It calls him a murderer from the beginning because he brought death into existence. Be on guard against such a dangerous foe!

### III.

While life-changing consequences were entering human experience, what really stands out is the seeking and saving grace from God. He had options when faced with the disobedience of Adam and Eve. My first reaction might have been to destroy the miscreants. They had their chance and blew it. Wipe them out with a zap of lightning from heaven. Get rid of the wayward, ungrateful rebels.

Another possibility would have been to abandon them to the consequences of their actions. You made your bed, now lie in it. See what life is like on sin's terms and wallow in it, experiencing the misery of knowing evil. I'll sit back and watch you squirm.

Or God could step in and do something about the problem—and that's exactly what happened. He came to them, sought them out, tried to make them aware of what they had done and get them to admit it. He called out to Adam, not to find him but to start the conversation. He didn't argue when Adam misrepresented the issue. He ignored responses of the couple which were unworthy of a reply. He had them sit in on the condemnation of the serpent and of Satan that further impressed on them who was in the wrong.

And then he made a marvelous promise, the first gospel promise. "I will put enmity between you (still talking to the devil) and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Enmity was actually the first word of the sentence. Conflict had entered the world through their disobedience. Now that enmity would be directed toward Satan. Eve would not keep listening to him. She would turn back to God. This alignment of sides would continue beyond those two. It involved her offspring, the believers. Like the angels he was created with, the devil doesn't produce children; his offspring are his allied evil angels and the unbelievers of the world. The enmity showed vividly already in the next generation when Cain killed Abel out of jealousy that God accepted his brother's offering but not his own. Such enmity remains. Jesus reminded his followers that the world hated him and them in a sermon text a few weeks ago. They join Satan in tempting us to sin. Some may express their enmity in mistreatment or ridicule, in efforts to remove God, his Word and standards from public life. Look how sin is promoted, even celebrated, in our society.

There was a special offspring to come, one who would crush the head of Satan. Crushing a head is a defeating action. The promised one would win the victory over him. We know who the victor is: it's Jesus, God's own Son. The Lord's words were not specific as to the who, when or where at this point, but he gave those first people a ray of hope to cling to. That lifeline was valuable as he then explained the results of sin in the struggles and troubles of life that were coming. He would add more details to reassure his people as time passed. He spoke here the first gospel promise.

He did not just make a promise but he fulfilled it. Centuries later Jesus came, the offspring of a woman, a true human being to stand in for us in living and in dying. His heel was struck. He endured painful attacks, but he was not defeated. The cross was a place of victory for Jesus. The cause of it all was his love and goodness. Saving us from sin was his work entirely. We are fully rescued. There is nothing for us to add to his payment for sin. He did it all. Believe it, even if it seems too good to be true. That is how God confronted sin and dealt with it head-on.

It might not be a rational discussion, for it exceeds our logic, but it works. Jesus restored a right relationship with God. Come in repentance to receive his saving grace. Hear it in the Word. Receive it today in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Rejoice in your Savior and live each day in thankful faith.