

We bow our hearts in prayer: Lord Jesus, as You walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, so walk with us in holy Communion. As You pursued them after they sinned, so pursue after us when we fall into temptation. As You promised them life through the fruit of the cross, so give this promise and life to us. And so that we do not despair in this world of sin and death, open our eyes to see righteousness and life in Jesus name. Amen.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "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, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen (John 17:17)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We are now in the season of Lent, a somber penitential season in which we especially reflect on the seriousness of our sins and their spiritual and eternal consequences.

This past week has been one filled with anecdotal evidence for the gravity of sin.

On one day, we saw a face of evil in our country as an expelled student premeditatedly massacred his former classmates in a Florida high school.

That same day, we heard that Allen Hinz's eyes were closed one last time in death.

On that same day, many of us gathered to receive ashes on our foreheads as a reminder of our own mortality.

Death is all around us. Sin and death. Sin and death.

It sounds very pessimistic, I know. But even those so young and vibrant have this in them.

Even babes-in-arms came up and received the ashes on their foreheads,

as a reminder to them, their parents, and to all others that they too will die one day.

We were reminded already this morning about what the Lord says about His commandments:

I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me...

& Luther's right when he explains, *God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments.*

Therefore we should fear His wrath and do nothing against these commandments.

We know this portion of the Small Catechism as the Conclusion to the Commandments, and they serve that purpose well, but did you know that in Exodus 20, these words don't come after the giving of all ten commandments?

They come on the heels of what we call the 1st Commandment. "*You shall have no other gods.*"

"... **For... the Lord [your] God is a jealous God.**"

He demands what is rightfully His: your fear, your love, and your trust.

Yet whenever you break any of the other commandments,

you have listened to the Tempter and taken the forbidden fruit.

You have shown no fear of God, loved yourself, and distrusted God and His Word.

You see your children and your grandchildren, even your great-grandchildren, and see how your sins have been passed down to them.

Isn't this what happens with *those who hate God*?

All we see is sin and death around us.

And when we see only death around us, life can get pretty hopeless.

And the devil would love to see you despair,

just as He would have loved to see Adam and Eve despair...

And despair they easily could have.

You see, they came from a completely different perspective.

They came into sin, from knowing and seeing only righteousness and life all around them.

They were created in God's perfect image, being naturally righteous and with perfect knowledge.

They feared Him – not afraid of His displeasure – but lived in holy awe of Him.

They loved Him above all, and trusted His Words and promises...

That is... until they listened to another voice, a different voice, with different words and promises.

This voice seemed to have better knowledge. "**Did God really say...?...**"

You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

What doubt he put before them? Is there any better way to pique curiosity?

"What don't I know? Why doesn't God want me to do this? How could it be so bad?"

All they knew, all they saw, was life all around them... Was there more?

We will never know exactly how Adam and Eve felt as they went from complete peace with God, walking confidently with Him in perfect *righteousness, innocence and blessedness*, to utter shame, guilt, and fear.

To have known and seen only life, and now to have your eyes opened to see only death, unable to return to the life you once knew. What a shock!

And then to hear God walking in the garden. What fear! Fear of punishment.
Fear that His Word and promise would come true, that they would actually die.
And true to His Word, they did die that day. **Dead in trespasses and sins.**
Despair would have started to set in as God began His investigation.
“Where are you?... Did you eat?... What have you done?”

These questions even haunt our lives and minds.
You know where you have been. Where you are. You know what you have done.
It is not hidden from God. And neither was theirs.

But while Adam hid from God, God pursued Adam. He would not let Adam hide in terror forever.
Instead, the Lord immediately made another promise, a promise that would give them life again.
He spoke, no longer of forbidden fruit, but of a promised Fruit, that’d come from Eve’s seed.
He spoke of Your Savior, Jesus Christ, who, being bruised Himself in death
would bruise the Serpent’s head... crush the devil’s power and defeat Him without a doubt.
This fruit would be found on a tree that looked to all the world only as a tree of death, the cross.
**And of this fruit so pure and sweet The Lord invites the world to eat,
to find within this cross of wood The tree of life with every good.** ELH #302:4

Adam and Eve heard that promise. They believed the Lord’s Word once again,
and received life back once again, even in a world where they now saw only death.
Their eyes were now opened indeed...
not only to see the reality of death around them,
but also now to see the new reality of righteousness and life in the promised Christ’s
life, death, and resurrection.

And just as God pursued after Adam and gave him promises of life again, so He pursues after you.
This life is yours too, as St. Paul says: **Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men,
so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.** Romans 5:18

In this world of death, there is hope and life for you!

There are still more promises, He shows **mercy to thousands of those who love [Him]
and keep [His] commandments.**

This He declares you have done on account of Jesus’ living a perfect life of *fear, love, and trust in God*,
even through the severest of temptations in the wilderness, in ordinary life, & during His Passion.
And to give you forgiveness for your distrust, fearlessness before God, and self-love,
and to confirm that forgiveness, and to strengthen you against the temptations, sin, and death
that you see all around you and know and feel in your heart,
He offers and commands you to eat of the promised fruit, the body and blood of Jesus
in the Sacrament of the Altar.

But beware of the devil’s temptations. He is still at work... up to his old tricks.

Before, God said, “Don’t eat,” the devil said, “Eat.”

Now, God says, “Take, and eat,” and the devil tempts, “Don’t eat.” And would give you doubt.

“Did God actually say you can have forgiveness of sins?... You will not actually live.

You can plainly see it is only bread and mere wine. It has no power to heal you.”

But you see, the devil knows that in eating it, your eyes will be opened,
not only seeing evil and death, but good and life in Christ Jesus,
as He comes and makes His home with and in you.

Dr. Luther reminds us: God *promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments.*
Therefore we should also love and trust in Him, and willingly do according to His commandments.

God grant you grace to fear, love and trust in God,

hearing His Word and promises given to you through this promised fruit of Eve,
given to you here at this Altar,

so that, without doubt or misbelief, you willingly and frequently eat this fruit from the tree of life
and receive the forgiveness of all your sins. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria