

"The Fruit of the Tree of Life"
Genesis 2:8-9 & 15-17

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Only true God - in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

The Old Testament Reading for today takes us to a time when and a place where we have only an inkling ... a vague notion of what once was so very good ... an obscure hint that causes a longing where we desire to live and move and have our being. God and the man commune for the Fall of man has not happened and the soil of the garden is not tainted with man's sinful nature. We are in the beginning of the Bible and we are in the God's specially prepared garden where a river carries the pristine Water of Life to the Tree of Life. The Fruit of this particular tree, if eaten, would bestow eternal life with the Lord God in His Paradise forever. Do you not long for such a time as this? Oh, dearly beloved, to have been able to eat ...

... *The Fruit of the Tree of Life*

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The Tree of Life was also in the midst of the garden, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. ... Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

How long before Adam eats in the Garden of Eden? We don't really know because the Bible doesn't tell us. But man was created with a table spread out before him and the Divine invitation to take and eat. So surely he must have become hungry in the matter of hours rather than months. The man names the names of cattle and birds. The man receives the blessing of woman. Satan then comes offering the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam eats and in doing so drinks the cup of the devil. But remember a truth that is as old as Adam and Eve, "*You cannot drink the Cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Table of the Lord and the table of demons*" (1 Cor. 10:21). That full fellowship and complete communion with the Lord is now broken as Adam and Eve experience the knowledge of good and evil. The two taste sin and it becomes a part of their nature ... almost, if you will, genetically encoded, woven with sin and

intertwined with transgression and laced with lawlessness. Adam and Eve feel the shame and are weighed down by the guilt as the pall of death suffocates them.

What does the Lord God Almighty do? He acts in mercy by not giving them what they deserve and He acts in grace by giving them what they do not deserve. He does not send them to hell and He does give them the promise of the Savior. Then He does something that, at first glance, appears to be unkind, uncaring and unloving. Listen.

"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever' — therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the Garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the Tree of Life" (Genesis 3:22-24).

There is a closed communion now and the Lord, in His kindness and goodness, has indicated that it would not now be pastoral for Adam, or for you, or for me to eat of the Fruit from the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden. In fact, the eating of this Fruit would now give the opposite of the intended blessing. Now, in our sinful condition, it would bring about an awful, eternal curse to and be horribly harmful for anyone to eat of this Fruit. Anyone who ate this Fruit would live forever in, with and under sin. God does not want that everlasting affliction for anyone, and in His mercy and benevolence He prevents Adam from attending the Lord's Table in the Garden and everyone, including you and me, from going to it lest we reach out and eat this Fruit that God had originally intended to be eaten for our good and for our eternal blessing. So serious is He in this that the Lord calls servants of His whose duty it is to prevent anyone from such eating. The cherubim stand guard over a communion that is now closed to everyone. Thanks be to God.

So we stand in solidarity with Adam — outside the Garden and sons of Adam, *"in his own likeness, after his image"* (Genesis. 5:3). Other than the response of "so what?" there are two reactions. First is that of further rebellion. "What an unloving God! He has prevented me from eating from the Tree of Life. I demand to be admitted. I'm a good person, certainly better than others. I have earned the right to eat of it. I demand it. I will challenge the cherubim and push them out of the way if necessary. No one, not even God, is going to tell me what is good for me and what is not. I deserve to eat of this Fruit."

Of course, this is not your attitude, is it? Your reaction is certainly different; it is one of repentance and faith. You hear the Word of the Lord God — *of every tree of the garden you may freely eat* — and know that it included the Tree of Life and while in sorrow at what might have been forever good, you thank God for keeping you from what would have been an eternal curse. You praise God for His messengers and their call to be at their posts and do what they have been called to do. You stand as a congregated people outside the Garden of Eden and you know and believe that this closed communion is for your benefit and comes from God Who loves you so much that He prevents you from eating from the Tree of Life in the Garden. Still, we stand as the sons of God — male and female — hungering together and longing for what He graciously wants for us and bountifully gives to us.

So we turn our backs to the Garden of Eden and we look ahead. What do our eyes see in this place of pestilence, war and suffering? What do we behold in this land of dust, decay and death? We see the Tree of Life. Do you not see it? Behold there it is, that tree, the Tree of Life outside the gate —

planted by sinful man at the Place of the Skull and used by the Holy God to accomplish His purpose. Do you not see it? It is a cursed cross ... a lifeless tree bearing a single, shriveled, scourged Fruit. Behold Jesus, the Fruit on the Tree of Life. He dies that you might live forever. He experiences hell that you might be with Him in Paradise. He takes all your sin upon Himself that you might have all His righteousness declared to be yours. Behold the Fruit on the Tree of Life.

The Fruit on the Cross is the Incarnate Word of God. He who eats this Fruit is the baby baptized into His Name and crucified with Christ — the child who, after confessing her sins and seeking forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death, hears the absolving Word of God from the mouth of one of His called servants — the adult who believes the words "given and shed for you for the remission of sins" — the man in jail who partakes of private confession and absolution — the old woman who hears the Good News of the atoning Sacrifice as she listens to the sermon and trusts such Word of God — the dying man who adds his amen to the 23rd Psalm. All these, and more, have eaten the Fruit that once hung on the Tree of Life.

Or, put another way, in the Words of Jesus Who says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; He Who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:53-54). Or, in still another way of saying the same thing, Jesus declares pure Gospel, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:16).

Thus pointed to the last day, the sons of God — male and female — join to remain steadfast in the Word, fighting the good fight of the faith, feeding on the Fruit and singing ...

"All newborn soldiers of the Crucified
Bear on their brows the seal of Him Who died."

... and praying ...

"O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
Raise us, and let your cross the magnet be."
(LW 311, stanzas 3&4)

The Old Testament Reading for today points us ahead us to a time when and a place where we will have more than an inkling ... much more than a vague notion of what once was so very good ... much, much more than an obscure hint that causes a longing where we desire to live and move and have our being. You see, we are at the end of the Bible and we have been given God's Word concerning a specially prepared Paradise inside the gates of the Holy City, a place where a river carries the pristine Water of Life to the Tree of Life.

"Then he showed me the river of the Water of Life, bright as crystal, flowing from the Throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the City; also, on either side of the river, the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the Throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him; they shall see His face, and His Name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:1-5). Amen.