

Sermon for Ash Wednesday

Date: February 17, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Genesis 3

Epistle Reading: Corinthians 15:45–58

Gospel Reading: Mark 6:7–13

Sermon Text: Genesis 3

Sermon Title: Significant Problem: Last Day in the Garden



Hymns:

LSB 418 – O Lord, throughout These Forty Days

LSB 611 – Chief of Sinners Though I Be

LSB 569 – In Adam We Have All Been One

LSB 572 – In the Shattered Bliss of Eden (*Tune 648*)

LSB 424 – O Christ, You Walked the Road

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Genesis 3

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.”

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” And to

Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work 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 that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Next to Good Friday, today is the most somber day on the Christian Calendar. Ash Wednesday is the day when we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. What does that mean? We are remembering a tragically significant day in human history. A day which brought about the necessity for everything else we will explore throughout this entire season of Lent. The day that created for us a significant problem. The problem is: To dust you shall return.¹

God, when He speaks these words, is addressing Adam immediately after the Fall bringing sin into God's perfect creation. He is telling Adam all of the consequences of his disobedience. God had warned Adam and Eve if they eat the fruit from that tree they will surely die.² They didn't obey God. They listened to Satan's temptation.

From that day death followed. From that day they were dead to God, eternally dead, eternally cut off, just as God said. Adam had been formed by God from the dust of the ground. God's words, "You are dust," acknowledged His creation of Adam from the dust of the ground. Then the words "to dust you shall return" acknowledge Adam's now approaching physical death and decay, returning to the ground from which he came.

You and I are conceived and born facing the same problem. St. Paul writes in Romans 5,

Sin came into the world through one man, and death
through sin, and so death spread to all men because all
sinned.³

That statement made by God to Adam is just as valid and significant when spoken to us: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."

A Significant problem! A problem we don't care to think about. Our own death, the fact that we will one day go back to the earth, it's not something we like to remember. It makes us uncomfortable. Culturally we avoid remembering that we are dust. From advertising to books to movies, so often the impression is given that life in this world goes on forever, that we are immortal. We convince ourselves that if we don't think about it, we can somehow avoid it. Many people go through life avoiding that one final earthly reality. God reminds today, "To dust you shall return."

1 Genesis 3:19
2 Genesis 2:17
3 Romans 5:12

People who remember that we are dust, are gathered here on this Ash Wednesday to repent of our sin. We confess; we admit before God and one another our sin and our sinfulness. We express our sorrow for those sins. We ask God to forgive our sin. We ask God to help us amend our sinful ways and live a more God-pleasing life.

Psalm 103 informs us that God “knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”⁴ Here’s the good news. In Scripture, whenever God remembers His people, He always acts on behalf of His people, to bless them. Here’s the better news. God had already remembered us before he told Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” God remembered us before He said, “Let there be light.”⁵⁶

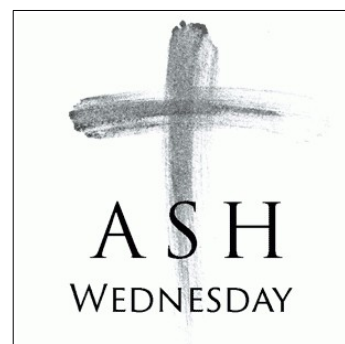
That should remind us of something. Just four verses before God spoke these words to Adam, on that same significant day, God spoke to Satan and assured him that God was going to send One who would crush his head.

Remembering that we are dust, remembering our frailty, God acted on behalf of us. He came here and lived among us Emanuel, Jesus the Holy Christ. He took on Himself all sin and the penalty for it, even death itself. He went into the earth, into the dust of the ground, as He was buried in a tomb. Even more, He endured the penalty of spiritual death there on the cross as He was abandoned by His Father when He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”⁷

Just a short time later He would say, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”⁸ and the final punishment for death would strike. Christ our Lord was dead. That should bring us to a somber place... but we don’t stay there. God has shown us when He remembers that we are dust, remembering our frailty, God acts on behalf of us.

Jesus would not remain in the dust of the earth. Scripture prophesies, “You will not allow Your holy One to see decay.”⁹ On the third day, Jesus would rise from the dust of the earth, just as He said He would. Because He rose, so will you.¹⁰ On the day when He returns, on that day called the Last Day, you, as a faithful and repentant believer in Jesus Christ, will rise from the dust of the earth with a new glorified body. Bodies that are incorruptible, no longer subject to sin. Bodies that are immortal, no longer subject to death.

4 Psalm 103:14
5 Genesis 1:3
6 Ephesians 1:4
7 Matthew 27:46
8 Luke 23:46
9 Psalm 16:10
10 Romans 6:5-6



That is why we do not simply place ashes on your forehead in any old pattern. We do it in the shape of a cross. Because only in the cross of Christ, and what occurred there, do we have hope and life eternal.

There's an old expression , "Left in the dust." You know, like in a race where one runner pulls away from the pack, the announcer might say the runner, "left them in the dust."

We give thanks to God that He has not "left us in the dust." He has not abandoned us to our deadly significant problem of death and decay. He has not left us behind. He came here to ensure we would be lifted from the dust of the earth. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, so we, too, will join Him "in a resurrection like His."¹¹

God will not leave us in the dust.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



11 Romans 6:5