

SERMON TEXT FOR LENT 1A

PREACHED MARCH 5, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: **Genesis 2.15-17, 3.1-7**; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-19; Matthew 4.1-11

The beautiful and kindhearted princess **Snow White** charms every creature in the kingdom except one - her jealous stepmother, the Queen. When the Magic Mirror proclaims Snow White to be the **fairest** one of all, the Queen is outraged. Snow White must flee into the forest, where she befriends the lovable seven dwarfs - Sneezy, Grumpy, Happy, Bashful, Sleepy, Dopey and Doc. But when the Queen tricks Snow White with an **enchanted apple**, only the magic of true love's **kiss** can save her.

Not much could save Adam and Eve when they ate a similarly-enchanted apple in the garden of Eden. This apple was from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and it looked *so enticing* that they just could not resist.

To be sure, God had given very **specific** instructions - parameters, if you will, about what they could or could not eat: *"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 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 die."*

Enter the **serpent** - not evil by nature, but certainly *"more **crafty** than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made."* And the serpent used this craftiness to entice (aka **tempt**) the first couple to **question** what God had said would happen to them. In fact, the serpent was **so** convincing, and the apple such a delight to look at, that Adam and Eve **ignored** God's instructions and ate the forbidden apple.

What made them eat the apple? **Temptation**. But what, exactly? The **appearance** of the apple and its potential sweetness? Yes, that was **part** of it. But remember what the serpent said, *"for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* There's the key phrase: **You will be like God. That's** what they were tempted by!

Just think about this for a minute. There they were in **paradise**, everything **beautiful** and **possible** at their feet. **Immortality** was theirs. And still, they could not grasp that they had **everything that they needed**, that God would **continue** to provide everything that they needed, and that they were **created in the image of God**. They already **were like God!** But somehow the serpent tricked them into believing that **they needed** that apple to make themselves **complete**. They were tempted away from doing what was **right** by a feeling of **inadequacy** and a crisis of **self-identity**.

There are **so many temptations** in this world. Most of them come not as **apples** hanging from a tree but rather **subtle messages** that seek to **undermine our identity** and invite us to **forget whose we are**.

- So many **commercials and advertisements** suggest that we are **inadequate**, and that we need **this** product or **that** service to make us whole and complete and "happy".
- So many **headlines** suggest that there is not **enough** to go around, so we **hoard** not only our fair share but **more** than our fair share, leaving others wanting.
- And so many **politicians** – of **all** parties – contend that we have a great deal to **fear**, whether it's the loss of a **job** or those **unlike** us - those of another **religion** or **country of origin** that we fear will try to harm us.

With all of these messages bombarding us, we have to be reminded that God says we are **exactly** the people God has created us to be. We need to be reminded that, if we all take only what we **need** and share our **abundance**, there is **plenty** to go around. And we need to, perhaps, readjust our thinking that the world is really not as scary as some would like us to think, that different or unknown is not always **bad**, and that we need not live in fear.

All the various temptations we may encounter in life stem from the **primary** temptation to forget **whose we are** and therefore to forget **who we are**. Because once we don't remember **who** we are and **whose** we are - children of God - we're likely to do all kinds of things to dispel our insecurities and try to recapture that sense of security and acceptance that is essential to being happy.

That, I believe, was Adam and Eve's problem. When the serpent came, he didn't start out with a **temptation** but instead sowed **mistrust** in Adam and Eve. (And, for the record, this one isn't **all** on Eve; Adam is there the whole time and just can't seem to find anything to say.) Adam and Eve became victims as much to original **insecurity** as they did to original **sin**. They **forgot whose they were**, and they lost themselves in the temptation to secure their identity on their own.

So, maybe **God** is to blame for this whole thing, for humanity's downfall in sinfulness. I say that because if God had not given humanity **free will** - choice - the freedom to make their own decisions (in this case, to eat the apple even though they had been told not to) - then they would not have been **tempted** to do so. They would have stuck with the apples from the other trees.

But that's the thing: God **did** give us free will. God gave us brains and intelligence and the ability to choose right from wrong. It's just that sometimes our desire to want to be God, or do our own thing, or think that God will not provide what we need - sometimes **those** thoughts and actions **win out** over the ones that have us trusting God wholly and completely. And when we allow **those**

serpents to entice us to **wrong choices**, then we find ourselves **naked** - either figuratively or literally - before God.

There is **good news** in this story. God told Adam and Eve that *"in the day that you eat of it you shall die."* But they **didn't** die. Maybe this is the **first instance** of God changing God's mind about punishing the sinful. They continued to live in the garden - but not without **consequence**. Their punishment was a newfound knowledge of their mortality. It was only through the death and resurrection of **Christ** that our immortality was restored.

God gives us choices between good and evil, between faith and anxiety, between righteousness and our selfish whims. Like Adam and Eve, we often make **poor** choices. And we need to **repent** of them. The season of Lent **offers** us that time, a time to give up our individual and collective stubbornness and take responsibility for the devastating things we have done against God and one another. At the same time, let us look to the God of grace and mercy to heal us of our wandering ways. AMEN