

“The Tree of Life to the Cross” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent Midweek 4 March 30, 2022

I. **Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:22-24.**

II. **Man and woman begin their journey in this world in a garden.**

- a. Adam and Eve are established in the Garden of Eden, surrounded by all kinds of creatures and vegetation that God created by His Word.
- b. And, it's interesting, but God's Word speaks about two very specific plants... or trees:
 - i. the tree of life, and
 - ii. the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - iii. It says that both trees were in the middle of the garden... and maybe they were even side by side.
- c. Martin Luther once said that God gave Adam and Eve a place to worship Him at the foot of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... because it was an act of obedience and love to refrain from eating...
 - i. So at the foot of one tree, they worship... and at the foot of the other tree they receive the gift of immortality... everlasting life.
- d. So there are two very important trees, as the man and woman live out their lives with their Creator... they live and walk in the presence of God Himself.

III. **And then . . . there is sin.**

- a. Adam and Eve disobey God, and they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- b. They give in to the whispers of the father of lies as he tempts them to turn from the one true God.
 - i. “You will not surely die.... You can be like God.”
 - ii. And they listen... They eat... they disobey.
 - iii. The parasite of sin digs into their hearts... and in fact, all of creation is infected by this same parasite of sin that separates us from God.
- c. We are separated from God by what St. Paul calls a “dividing wall of hostility” in Ephesians 2:14...
 - i. We are not allowed to be in the beauty of the Garden of Eden any more than Adam and Eve were... were are removed from the presence of the other tree, the tree of life.
 - ii. The cherubim and the flaming sword stand guard to keep any us of from getting back to this tree because if we could eat from it, we would live forever...
 1. Not only is humanity exiled from the garden... but we are exiled from life itself.
 - iii. God knows that if we were to eat from the tree of life as a sinner, then the immortality it would give us would be far worse than death...

because we would live forever as sin continues to tear us up... in body and soul...

1. That is a curse that's tough to imagine.

iv. Sin needs to be dealt with first—atoned for, washed away—before life without end can be a blessing and joy.

IV. **So, how do we deal with sin first?**

- a. The fact that we are sinful completely pulls us out of the equation... as sinful human beings, we cannot be part of the solution.
- b. As sin has made its way into every part of our being, we offer nothing when it comes to saving ourselves or getting out of this mess.
- c. In truth, we just kind of bumble helplessly through our lives... without any hope of fixing the problem of sin.
- d. Not only can we not fix sin, but we can't restore our relationship with God either...
 - i. I know lots of people believe they can find God or make themselves right to get on His good side... but that relationship is beyond human repair.
- e. Returning to what God intended for humanity from the beginning is beyond our reach.

V. **Beyond our reach, but not beyond God's reach!**

- a. As Adam and Eve lost everything through a tree... God's own Son gained everything back for us through a different tree.
- b. The issue, the problem, the horrible disaster of sin requires another tree.
 - i. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.
 - ii. Jesus, God's Son, becomes flesh and blood like us, so that He could crush the serpent and pay the price that is required for sin.
 - iii. Christ Jesus comes into the flesh because of the kind of price that's demanded.... Which is blood.
 - 1. Only blood can pay the price and wash away sin.
 - 2. Only the blood of the Lamb—the Lamb who is spotless... who is the perfect sacrifice, a perfect and holy offering—only the blood of the Lamb is required... well, and a tree.
- c. The Son of Man must be lifted up upon a tree just as the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness (John 3:14)
 - i. The tree of the cross... which is nothing more than a torture device to cause suffering and death... that is the tree that Jesus is lifted up on.
 - ii. On the cross, Jesus suffers and dies.... On the cross, His holy and precious blood is shed... On the cross, Jesus lays down His life so that our lives can now be restored.
 - iii. A perfect sacrifice brings salvation and restoration to the pinnacle of God's creation... humans... to us.
- d. So, Jesus turns an instrument of death into a tree of life.

- i. His death brings us life... life eternal.
- ii. Our exile from the presence of God is ended.... Our exile from the tree of life is over.
- iii. Christ Jesus has taken the sins of all the world to the tree and has been lifted up for everyone to look up and see.
- iv. And from that amazing act of love.... He draws all people to Himself.
- v. The cross brings us together with God as He freely gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- vi. We don't have to bumble through our lives helplessly anymore – trying to figure out the solution to sin...
- vii. We are drawn to the One who became sin for us so that we could be saved... (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- viii. Instead, we are drawn to the foot of the cross... the new “tree of life”

VI. **Tree to tree.**

- a. The tree of life... to the tree of the cross—another life-giving tree.
- b. A journey from life.... to death.... and back to life again.
- c. We have been restored to life and our relationship with God has been fixed.
- d. Now it's possible to live every day with a hope and a future that was not possible without God's intervention... as we consider John's words from Revelation 22:
 - i. “The angel 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. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1–2).
 - ii. This is the life that has been restored to us: life everlasting, life in the courts of heaven, life in the presence of the Lamb, life that is ours in Christ Jesus.
 - iii. A return from exile, a return to our God by way of a tree. In Jesus' name. Amen.¹

¹ based on the sermon series, “Return from Exile: A Lenten Journey,” Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2017.