First Sunday in Lent
Texts: Genesis 3:1-21; Matt 4:1-11
February 22, 2026

The Fruits of Fear & Flight

Martin Luther stated in his commentary on Genesis that immediately following the fall into sin, the mere sound of rustling leaves on the evening breezes filled Adam and Eve with ***utter fear and terror.*** That's how far they had fallen. That's how totally divisive this fall from grace was… ***and they knew it.*** Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and then tried to "fix" the problem of their naked and exposed shame by covering themselves, stitching together garments of fig leaves. ***Maybe God won't notice.*** But then we're told that they heard the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool breezes of the early evening, and that's when they lost it. They took off in ***sheer terror,*** trying to hide themselves from their God and Father.

Now, there are ***MANY*** things we could say on this, and they'd all be good and right for us to meditate on too. Just consider how God comes to them after they sin. He doesn't come in a tempest of fire and brimstone and smoke and lightning, pouring out His justly-deserved fiery wrath upon them the very instant they disobey Him and sin against Him. Had they earned it? Absolutely! But that's not what God does. Rather, He comes to them ***quite calmly and peacefully,*** walking—casually strolling—in the calm, cool breezes. It's like He's out for a relaxing walk at dusk. He comes to them, calling out very innocently and lovingly (like a parent playing hide-and-seek with their little one), *"Where are you? Where'd you go?"*

Already here our God and Lord is coming to His fallen children, not to drop the hammer and punish them, but in a very ***patient and gentle*** way that gives His beloved children ***opportunity to repent;*** opportunity to come to Him in contrition and sorrow, repenting of their sins and calling upon Him to be merciful (which He's already exhibiting in these actions). Sadly, though, their sinfulness blinds them to this merciful reality. As wise as they thought they were; as wise as they thought their disobedience would make them, their sin had made them utterly stupid and terrified of God. Hearing God in the cool breezes and rustling leaves, ***they fled and hid in terror.***

What a bunch of foolish rubes, right? And yet…as tragically foolish and sad as this fleeing from God in terror truly is, there is something here that they do get right (and we fail miserably at): They are actually ***terrified*** by their sin. They get it. They know that their sin means eternal death and separation from their God and Father. They knew what perfection was like, and they knew all that they had just thrown away in a moment of arrogant pride, lust, and covetousness. They truly were ***ashamed*** of their sin, and they were ***utterly terrified and ashamed*** to be in the presence of God with their sinfulness on full display.

How many of you can say that? Keep in mind: God knows the heart. God knows your heart better than you do. How many of you are ***truly*** ashamed of your sin? Understand: I don't mean ashamed that you got caught. I don't mean ashamed that others may know your dirty little secret. I mean ***truly ashamed*** because you have sinned against God. ***Does your sin terrify you?*** I didn't ask if it bothers you. I asked if it ***terrifies*** you. **It should.** The wage of sin is death, and God doesn't take sin lightly. Just look at this cross. God sent His only-begotten Son to pay that unpayable wage of sin. That's how seriously God takes sin. God ***died*** for sin.

How often, though, we don't take our sin very seriously. Sure, it's a problem. It might even keep us up at night once in a while with feelings of ***guilt or regret.*** I know I'm not the only one who wishes I could go back in time and undo the stupid sins I've done. But I'll also admit that I don't exactly try to ***flee*** from God when I sin either. Sometimes I don't even feel ashamed of my sin. Everyone else is doing it, right? All this, despite the fact that I know what God says about its deadly wage. In fact, there are plenty of times that I ***know*** something is a sin, and yet I ***willingly*** rush headlong into it, smugly confident in the fact that I can just confess and repent later. I can do what I want right now, and God will forgive me. ***Correct me if I'm wrong, but that doesn't exactly sound like someone who is truly terrified of sin.*** That's cheap grace, nothing more. That's someone who neither understands nor truly believes what God says about the realities of sin and the sweet injustice of His mercy, grace, and justification.

Now, here's the thing: Fleeing is not wrong. I don't want to give the ***wrong impression,*** as if we should follow Adam and Eve's example and try to flee in terror and hide from God whenever we sin. **That's not at all what I'm saying.** I will say… Adam and Eve ***did*** understand the reality of their sin, which caused them to flee. We could certainly learn something from that. But…we who stand on this side of Easter have something that Adam and Eve didn't have in those first terrifying moments when they heard God drawing near to them: We have the Gospel assurance that ***It Is Finished***, once and for all in Christ Jesus and because of Christ Jesus. Fleeing is not the issue. The issue is: ***Why do you flee? Where do you flee? To whom do you flee?***

Again, I direct your attention to this cross. Behold the wrath and terror and shame! According to God's Word (Deut 21:22-23), to be crucified (hung on a tree) meant that God had utterly forsaken you. You were considered to be cursed by God Himself. Look here! Jesus became that cursed and abandoned One…for us. He cries out from His blood-soaked cruciform altar, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"*

But…let that sink in. Despite being utterly forsaken and abandoned by His own heavenly Father, Jesus **never** loses faith, not for a moment. *"If you really are*

the Son of God, prove it. Come down off that cross. Save yourself." Jesus doesn't take the bait. He doesn't flee from His selfless obedience to His Father. He doesn't flee from His heavenly Father and His holy will. Instead, He faithfully flees ***to*** and clings ***to*** His God and Father, even as He is passing through the valley of the shadow of death. In spite of all the pain and suffering and torment, God remains *"My God."*

And ***WHY*** is Jesus on this cross? Why did His own heavenly Father treat Him as ***accursed and despised?*** It wasn't because He had sinned. Jesus deserved not one single moment of His Father's wrath. When tempted to sin, as we all are, He didn't succumb to the temptations we all do. So… ***WHY*** is He on this cross, suffering all this ***shame and wrath for sins He didn't commit? The short answer: love—love for you, me, and all children of Adam.*** Jesus graciously and lovingly endured all this suffering because of us and our sin. The innocent One became the curse in our place. The blameless One suffered our justly-deserved shame and punishment. The Lord of Glory utterly emptied Himself for us, making Himself to be ***nothing***—the lowest of the sinful low from God's perspective—all so that we undeserving sinners might inherit everything that our Lord has prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

Look to this cross! Here is your salvation. Here is your confidence of peace and blessed assurance. Here is almighty God's incomprehensible and undeserved mercy and grace, lifted up and exalted for you and for all the world to see…***and to turn and flee to and hold fast to*** in the joy of repentant thanksgiving. This is what Adam and Eve didn't know in those terrifying moments as God drew near to them. **Here is the fulfillment of that first Gospel promise.** By God's grace, through faith, we do know what this means, not just for us, but for all children borne of Adam.

And we also know that this *[the crucifix]* isn't the end of the story. ***We know how the rest of the story goes.*** We know that He vanquished the last enemy, which is death, by rising again three days later...just like He had promised. Death has no dominion over Him. We also know, by faith, that we have been baptized into His victorious death and His resurrection. Purely by His grace, His victory is made to be our victory. Through Baptism, God has ***sealed us and marked us*** as His beloved children. There's an ancient Church tradition, already prevalent in the Old Testament, that says our Lord clothed Adam and Eve in the skin of a lamb. An innocent lamb's life was taken, it's blood shed, for the sake of sinners. In a similar, but much greater way, that's exactly what happens in Holy Baptism; our Lord covering us over in the righteousness of the Lamb of God. By grace, through faith, we know this.

By grace, through faith, we also know that He continues to keep His Word and promise to abide with us always. Look no further than this altar. Just like in

the Garden, ***Your Lord continues to draw near to you in very humble and unassuming means.*** No fiery wrath. No heaven-rending lightning and blaring trumpets and war horses. Nope. Here is Christ, on the calm and serene "breezes" that are His Word and Sacrament. Here is Christ, given and shed for you and your forgiveness.

You know…when you understand all this, how can you ***not*** want to flee here? Some folks take offense at that question. ***Maybe they should.*** Talk is cheap. You're known by your fruits. ***Why do you flee? Where do you flee? To whom do you flee?*** When you understand all that God Himself gave up for you; when you understand how God didn't flee from you and your sin, but instead willingly came down into this fallen veil of tears in order to take on your flesh and crush the head of the serpent, sin, and death for you, ***how can you not want to flee here to be in His loving presence, receiving His gifts of grace?*** Knowing all that Christ gave up for your sin, how can you not want to flee from sin, and instead flee in thanksgiving into the outstretched arms of Him who died for that sin?

I'll leave it at that. Here is Christ, for you, for me, and for all who are weak and heavy-laden. As long as you are able to draw air into your lungs and repent of your sin, ***flee here, for here is your life, your joy, and your peace that surpasses all understanding.*** May this Christ-centered peace and joy be your peace and joy, and may your peace and joy in Christ show itself in the good fruits of both word and deed, borne out of an ***authentic, repentant thanksgiving and love*** for Him and all that He's done for you, and may this be the case now and into all eternity.

AMEN