

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Below are the readings and sermon for Sunday September 13, 2020. I hope they have reached you in good health and the Spirit of our Lord.

In Christ's Peace,

Pastor Steve

### **Genesis 2:4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8**

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

#### **Another Account of the Creation**

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, '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.'

#### **The First Sin and Its Punishment**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' 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 middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not 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 loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

### Sermon

In the first account of creation (yes there are two) God created everything we know in existence. And we read in Genesis that at the conclusion of the 6<sup>th</sup> day God declared that creation was, “indeed good”. *God saw that everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.* In the second account of creation from Genesis chap. 2 we receive a more detailed account of creation that narrates the process of God giving life to the first human by breathing life into his nostrils. God then places him in the garden of Eden. Here the man will begin life on earth. Along with the garden, comes a rule from God, “*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, or you shall die.*”

This statement of God’s comes with a lot of questions, huge implications and baggage. With this statement God has given freewill, the ability to self-determine to Adam. In this statement, we are compelled to question God’s intent for placing a no-no, something so tempting in their midst. *It’s almost like placing a plate of freshly baked chocolate cookies on the coffee table while a pack of toddlers play with puzzles and blocks, and saying don’t touch or else.* God places this tree in the middle of the garden. It is at the center. Almost unavoidable. Didn’t God just say that he saw to it that all of creation was good? How is this good?

As the story goes, God sees to it that the man (meaning Adam) is not alone. Taking a rib from the man while in a deep sleep, God fashioned it into a partner called woman; meaning from out of man. Great, thank God for women. Literally. Now this is where the story hits close to home. Adam does not tell the woman (Eve) about this tree in the middle of the garden. And thus we have our first incidence of a man not communicating well with his wife. Fellas, we come by it naturally! All kidding aside, this was an important detail. *Eve, don’t mess with that tree in the middle of the Garden. God said not to eat it or touch it. And if we do, we will die.* Nope, according to the bible record Adam didn’t say a word about it too her. As far as we know, Adam never even laid eyes on the tree. So eventually when the fruit is offered to him he was not aware of what he was biting into. Ok, so maybe I am making excuses for Adam, but overall, I think this little detail adds to Adams use of freewill. For however long he was alone in

the garden, he managed to avoid it. Perhaps he forgot about it? Whatever the case, he did not pass on God's one and only rule to Eve. Kind of makes you wonder who misused their free-will first? T-shirts and bumper stickers have long claimed that, Eve was framed! Whatever the case may be, the intent of God, the intent of the author or authors, this initial story of God's word tells us a lot about God's character.

Plain and simple God is to be obeyed. Adam exists, because God willed it to be. God knew that what was in the garden was enough for Adam. God wanted Adam to be content with what he had provided. All Adam needed was there in that garden. In fact, God was so in tune with what Adam needed, God provided him with a partner. A companion to share in all that God had provided. God improved upon, upgraded creation by adding a woman. You ladies have been knowing this long before us fellas! Adam and Eve had it all, including free-will. God gave them freewill, to make good choices. God gave them freewill so that they did not blindly rely upon on God like a robot needs programming, but instead with the ability to consider life and consult God. Afterall, if God created you, would you not consult your creator, if say, you think it is good idea to think or do something. God gave them freewill so they could make life choices that benefit one another.

Freewill lead Eve and then Adam to the tree of good and evil in the middle of the garden. As far as we know the tree has not been seen yet. Maybe they have been taking peeks at the tree. God never said to not look at the tree. God only commanded for it to not be eaten. Eve would expand on God's rule and tell the serpent, that God said not to touch it. Is this a clue that Eve knew the gravity of the consequences and was now pushing back against the serpent. *Not only should I not eat the fruit, but I cannot even touch it.* Look but don't touch...we've heard that before too haven't we? Like those cookies on the coffee table. Look, but don't touch.

Keep in mind, God saw that this beginning of creation, was to be good. With God's good intention as our guiding principle we have to believe Adam and Eve were not set up for failure. Their freewill and the tree smack dab in the middle of their existence were not a means by which God was to see them fail. This is not a case of, *I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.* That was not God's intent. God's intent was for them to know that he is all they need, and that anything other than God himself will not give them a full life, but will in affect take life from them. Their will to interact with the tree and the serpent was left up to them. The tree was there as a reminder of God as being the creator of life and Lord of all, and eventually as the source of their forgiveness and healing.

Plenty makes it way to the center of our lives. The fragility of our human existence is that so much of what God would not have us rely on, and put our trust in, ends up coopting our heart and minds and leading us to a living death. Adam and Eve's banishment from the

garden for disobeying God would lead to their knowing what it was to disappoint their creator. Had they not sought to know more, and be like God, they would have known eternal life. In wanting to know and have more...more power. Knowledge is power. Yeah, we know that one too. Except for in relationship with God. God doesn't desire power over us! God desires relationship. God desires our trust in him. Adam and Eve wanted more. They weren't satisfied with all they had, and look what it got them.

God wants to be at the center of our lives. The tree was there to remind those first humans who created and provided all for them. It served as a deterrent from their selves. And Jesus, he was nailed to the trunk of a tree so that we may be reminded of our creator Father God, who gives us life, healing and forgiveness. From the tree of good and evil to the tree of life in Jesus Christ, God has always desired to provide us with life.

Jesus at the center of our lives. Nothing else. Jesus at the center...and everything else that radiates outward from us is good. Jesus at the center and we get out of the way and let the goodness of God do the walking and talking through us. That original freewill God bestowed on Adam and Eve returns to us and aims to do good among us.

The more Jesus is at the center of our lives, the more in touch we become with the love of God, the more we **know** God...all the more we trust God.

Is Jesus at the center of your life? To what extent is Jesus at the center of who you are in relation to God's people? We saw how simple of slip it was for Adam and Eve to fall out of favor with God. But thanks be to God we live under the new covenant/promise of God's one and only Son Jesus. The bible tells us that we are justified (made good with God) by grace through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We know this to be God's truth for us. Such beautiful words of love and promise are the roots of our faith. How do you respond to this? What does faithful obedience to Christ's love at the center of your life look like?

Are you mindful about judging the neighbor without knowing the neighbor?

Are you loving thy neighbor...food, water, shelter, clothing...offering your presence?

Are you prayerful about not preserving what preserves and secures just your interests?

In other words, praying for God's will be done?

Are you prayerful about considering what the Holy Spirit is considering for you...for Nativity Lutheran?

Are you hopeful despite what seems contrary?

Are you seeking God's forgiveness, and offering it to others?

If it sounds like work, well, it is. Being a follower of Christ is work.

It calls us into denying the will of the world, the will of ourselves, and giving into the will of God. Sometimes we get it, we do the right, we see to it that something good is done, a life has been changed, transformed, repaired...hope is made tangible...and sometimes we don't.

Sometimes we walk on by, do what is easy, look the other way, say something hurtful, do something hurtful...eat of bad fruit. The good news is that God approaches us. The Lord God was walking in the garden after the fruit had been eaten. Adam and Eve went into hiding. It does not have to be like that for you and I. There is no need to hide. God's walked this earth a second time in Jesus so that we may have the opportunity so that we may be seen as good, and so that we may see to I that God's church and people are good as well.

Do not be afraid. Whatever is firmly planted at the center of your life, can be pulled out by its root. Whatever it may be, God Spirit's awaits your cooperation, your surrendered will, so that His Son Jesus may be planted, replanted, or pruned into a blooming tree of life, healing and forgiveness for all. Amen.