

## **What about forever?**

A sermon for the Third Sunday after Pentecost

At the beginning of the season of Pentecost, there is the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 and 3 and the beginning of our troubles. With that comes the whole discussion about Eve. The feminists have been battling about this issue for forty years. They say that Eve is a victim, even though they come up against 1 Timothy 2:14 (paraphrased): For Adam was formed first, then Eve; but Eve sinned first.

What do we make of this question as we look at how things began? First of all, the feminists point out that she would have sinned out of ignorance. How did she know? There was this command not to eat of the tree of life, but how would she know what it was all about? She really couldn't be made accountable for much more than a simple mistake.

In the second place, she didn't do this out of malice. She didn't say: "I'm going to bring the whole world down forever and create all the problems." That wasn't the case either.

In the third place, the feminists point out that in a way she is a kind of heroine, like Prometheus. In Greek mythology Prometheus reached up and stole fire from heaven and brought it to earth, which is for us a blessing and a curse. Like Prometheus, Eve is not a puppet but someone who acts independently. St. Augustine said: "O Happy Sin!" because the sin of Eve brought the Savior. Then it could be said once again that she is a victim.

In the fourth place, can Adam and Eve really be separated? Jewish speculation in the Eighth Century pointed out that it says in Gen 1:27: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." That's in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2 there is another account of Adam and Eve being created in a different way. But male and female are equal because they are equal in the first account in Genesis 1.

There is amazing ignorance, even willful ignorance, about how Paul deals with this question of Adam and Eve. In Romans 5:12-18 and 1 Cor 15:21-22 Paul talks about the origin of sin, original sin. Here's Romans 5:12: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—" Then it goes on again and again and again to say through Adam, through one man, came sin and death. In no way does Paul say first

Eve sinned and then Adam. In 1 Cor 15:21-22 Paul writes: "For by a man came death . . . For as in Adam all die . . ." It's through Adam that sin came.

All of this is trivial.

As we look at these texts, there really are some things we have to face. The basic way to look at this is to ask: Is there a problem?

A lot of people will answer: "There's no problem." Then there is no need of a solution.

What is the problem? It can be stated in two big questions. It's not like the comic strip that says: "The problem with young people is that they are always talking about the future because they have no past. The problem with old people is that they are always talking about the past because they have no future." The first big question is: "What about forever?"

There's an old saying that goes: "Only one life and it will soon be past." Then what? "What about forever?" Only a small portion of Americans who identify as Christian go to church regularly. What are the rest who don't go to church thinking? "What about forever?"

There are two common answers. First, some say: With all the progress in science, medicine, and all the rest, we're extending life, easing end-of-life suffering, and thus the question "What about forever?" isn't so important.

Second, there's the approach called "mañana" – I'll deal with it when I get to it. I'll deal with this life now, and when this life ends, I'll deal with what comes next. This is nothing new about this. There's that verse in Isaiah 22:13 (700 years before Christ), "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Of course, the prophet pours scorn on that. But there is that idea: I'll deal with life one world at a time, and that's all that's important.

The second big question, closely related to "What about forever?", is "Is there any meaning to it all?" To this second big question: "Is there any meaning to it all?", there are three basic responses by those who not concerned about Christianity.

First, many are content to live life on their own terms. As long as they feel happy, they don't worry about "Is there any meaning to it all?" or "What about forever?"

Second, there's the grain of sand perspective. Each of us is like one a grain of sand on the sea shore or one of trillions of stars. Who am I, or who are you? What

difference does it make? We're here today and gone tomorrow. Why even bother with meaning?

Third, as people scrap about atheism, one of the things that is said is that we're able to have ethics without having religion. That's a no-brainer. There is ethics because in order to make life work, there need to be certain rules. There's nothing new about that. Therefore religion is really an imposition, a superstructure we don't need. We're able to ignore religion and have a good life. In fact, if we could just get rid of religion, things would be better.

But that's not the way it's going. Things are not getting better. In the Twentieth Century, more Christians have been killed because of their faith than in all the previous centuries combined. Even in the West animosity to Christianity is growing.

When we come down to the whole matter of "sin," many people treat it as a kind of joke. There's no regard for sin as serious or even death as serious.

If we look at modern philosophers and psychologists, we see that these professionals use terms like sin and death but merely descriptively. Sin and death are handled therapeutically, because basically everybody is a victim. What is important is that we each have self-esteem, and then accept death as the natural end.

But: "What about forever?" and "Is there any meaning to it all?"

That brings us back to the third chapter of Genesis. In Genesis 3:5 the temptation is: "You will be like God." That's the temptation. That's the problem: "You will be like God."

Original sin is that we all fall into the idea that I can run life, and I am O.K., finally.

But what about what Romans 5:12: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"? We are all caught in sin and death. What about that?

Scripture is extremely explicit about sin and death. In Romans 6:23 it says: "The wages of sin is death." Then in 1 Cor 15:26; "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." And 1 Corinthians 15:56: "The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law." There is no way that this is psychologized. There's no way this is natural.

In fact, it could be said that in God's good will, it was not intended that there be sin and death. But that has come, and we have the Christian message: 1) God saw the

problem: sin and death. 2) He solved it his way on the cross, and it's not something we can understand or figure out, and 3) It's solved. John 19:30: "It is finished."

This brings us back to Genesis 3:5, to the temptation we all fall into. We think we run our own lives, and we know how to run the universe.

In fact, we are called to be creatures. He is the Creator. And the glorious freedom we have is to be his creatures. As it says in Matt 6: Then we can live as the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, knowing that he cares for us and we can leave everything to Him.

We don't have to try to run the universe or to be those who are in control. He is Lord, and he has taken it upon himself not only to be Lord but to make it all right. We can then live as Luther writes in the Small Catechism:

"He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

"All this he has done that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true." Amen