

WEDNESDAY OF INVOCABIT

“He shall bruise your head; and you shall bruise His heel.”

Genesis 3:15

What would you have done? If you were Eve in the garden, how would you have handled the situation? A serpent comes slithering up to you and starts talking to you, trying to convince you to disobey the one command God has given you, completely contradicting His Word. Your husband, Adam, is just standing there, not saying or doing anything about it. What would you have done? I think we all like to imagine that we would *not* have done what Eve did. That we would have at least put up a *little* more of a fight, coming back at the devil with something like, “Now, how is it you’re able to talk, exactly? You’re not a *real* serpent, are you?” Or, “You know, between the word of a creepy talking snake and God, who has made me and all creatures, who richly and daily provides me with all that I need to live, who defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil, and who does all this only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit of worthiness in me, I’m going to go with the latter.” Or maybe just chuck the fruit at his face. But no *way* would we have done what Eve did and actually *listened* to the serpent’s lies, questioning God’s goodness and turning against Him and His Word so easily for the sake of satisfying personal desire. No *way* would we have done *that*.

Only, you would have.

Hans Christian Anderson, a 19th century Danish author, wrote everything from plays to novels to poetry, but he is best known for his *fairy tales*; some of his most famous include “The Little Mermaid,” of Disney fame, “The Princess and the Pea,” and “The Ugly Duckling.” But one of his lesser known stories is one called “The Garden of Paradise.” Written in 1839, “The Garden of Paradise” tells the tale of a king’s son who is obsessed with finding the Garden of Eden. Having heard about it as a child from his grandmother and how wonderful it must have been to live there, the Prince says, “Oh, why did Eve take of the tree of knowledge? Why did Adam eat the forbidden fruit? If it had only been I, it would not have happened, and sin would never have entered the world.”

Then, one day, by chance, the Prince happens upon someone who knows the way to the Garden of Paradise. It still exists, and this person agrees to take

him there. When he arrives, the Prince is met by the Fairy of the Garden, who is young and very beautiful. She shows him the Garden of Paradise, which is even more wonderful than he imagined. He asks the Fairy, "Can I stay here always?" The Fairy answers, "That depends on you. If you do not, like Adam, allow yourself to be tempted to do what is forbidden, you can stay here always." The Prince assures her that he will not. "My will is strong," he says. So the Fairy lays out a simple test: "Every evening when I leave I must say, 'Come with me,' and I must beckon to you. But stay behind! Do not come with me, for with every step you take your longing will grow stronger...but if you press a kiss upon my lips, Paradise will sink deep down into the earth, and it will be lost to you." Again, the Prince is confident. But on the very first night, the Fairy beckons to the Prince, "Come with me," and he rushes toward her, forgetting everything, and kisses her. "Then came a sound like thunder, louder and more awful than any he had ever heard before, and everything around collapsed. The beautiful Fairy, the flowering Paradise sank deeper and deeper. The Prince saw it sink into the darkness of night. It shone far off like a tiny twinkling star. The chill of death crept over his limbs. He closed his eyes and lay long as if dead."

That's you. That's me. We may say we're different, that our "will is strong," but don't kid yourself: you would have done exactly the same thing. You already *have*. You see, it's not just Eve's fault that we're in the mess we're in, living in a world full of pain and suffering. It's not just Adam's fault, as the head of the household who failed in his responsibility to lead and protect. But, "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin...so death spread to all men because *all sinned*."¹ *All* have been tempted by the devil, *all* have believed his lies, *all* have questioned God's goodness and forsaken His Word to pursue their own sinful desires. "There is no one who is righteous," writes the apostle Paul.² Not a single one. Not even you.

How do you know this? How do you know that you are a sinner? From the Ten Commandments, which you have not kept. God has given you a command: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Think about who you are to those around you, whether a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker. In your God-given vocation, have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been

¹ Romans 5:12.

² Romans 3:10.

hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm to anyone?³ Of course you have. We *all* have. As we confess to God in the service of Compline, “Some of my sin I know—the thoughts and words and deeds of which I am ashamed—but some are known only to You.” We don’t even *know* how sinful we are. That’s how bad it is.

And there are consequences: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”⁴ Those words weren’t just for Adam; they’re for you, too. Sin separates us from God, as it did Adam and Eve. It makes our lives more difficult, as it did theirs. We have pain and trouble, just like they did. And worst of all, we will die, not because of anyone else’s sin, but because of our own, which we ourselves have committed. So, imagine all you want that you would have done things differently than Adam and Eve. Imagine that you are better or stronger or smarter than they were. But that’s nothing more than a fairy tale. In reality, the truth is you’re just like them.

But that’s not entirely a bad thing. Yes, sin is bad, and the consequences of sin are bad; Adam and Eve were *right* to be ashamed of their sin, as are we. But the last thing we want to do is *distance* ourselves from them, our first parents. I run into this a lot with the middle schoolers I teach. They want nothing to do with Adam and Eve. “It’s not fair,” they say. “I wasn’t there! I didn’t take the fruit and eat it!” Maybe you feel the same way. But think about this: when Adam and Eve sinned, *they’re* the ones God drew near to; *they’re* the ones who received the promise of a devil-stomping Savior; *they’re* the ones whom God clothed with garments of skins to cover their shame. He didn’t do those things for people who were *unlike* Adam and Eve; He did them for Adam and Eve, Patients Zero for this deadly, universal pandemic we call sin.

And God kept His promise. Many years later, God sent His Son Jesus to do battle with the devil, overcoming his temptations, as we heard about this past Sunday, casting out his offspring, the demons, and removing his poisonous fangs one by one, until finally, He crushed his head with His own bloody heel. In that moment, Adam’s guilt was removed, and Eve’s sin atoned for.

³ *Luther’s Small Catechism*, Confession, “Which sins are these [that we should confess]?”

⁴ Genesis 3:19.

But not just *their* guilt. Not just *their* sin. When He died on the cross, Jesus won forgiveness for *all* who are just like them. For “as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”⁵ You can only be justified if you are wrong. You can only receive life if you are dead. So, unless you are just like Adam and Eve, then this promise, this Savior, is not you for. But if you *are* just like them, then you are like them in all the *other* ways as well: you are sought by God, your heavenly Father, who loves you very much and wants to be with you; you are saved by Him whose good and gracious will it is to stop the evil will of the devil, the world, and your sinful heart; your shame is covered, not with garments of skins, but with the garments of salvation,⁶ with Christ Himself, who was put on you in your Baptism.⁷ By faith, you aren’t just children of Adam and Eve; you are just like them. For you the tempter has been overthrown, and you are a child of paradise.

Anderson’s story does not have a happy ending; but ours does, because whether or not we get to be in Paradise doesn’t depend on us. Our wills are weak, but Christ’s is strong. *He* has done it. His free gift of grace abounds for many. And though our bodies will one day feel the chill of death, He will breathe into us the breath of life again. He will beckon to us, “Come with Me,” and we will open our eyes and rise to long life, more wonderful than we can imagine. We will ask Him, “Can I stay here always?” And He will answer, “Yes.”

In ✠ Jesus’ name. Amen.

SDG

⁵ Romans 5:18-19.

⁶ Isaiah 61:10.

⁷ Galatians 3:27.