

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, your Creator, has given you, completely contradicting His Word. And 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 definitely would have.

You may know the name Hans Christian Anderson. He was a 19th century Danish author, who 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,” “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, he is met by a figure called the Fairy of the Garden, who is young and very beautiful. She shows him around, and much to his delight Paradise is even more wonderful than he imagined. So, 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. And the story ends: "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. Indeed, there is no one who is righteous. Not a single one. Not even you.

You know this, first of all, from the Ten Commandments, which you have not kept. God has given you a command: Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Think about who you are to those around you, whether a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or

¹ Romans 5:12.

worker. In this God-given vocation, have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been 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?² 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.

You also know this from the fact that you suffer the consequences: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”³ 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. Imagine that you are better or stronger or smarter than your first parents. It’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 to *distance* ourselves from them. 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, casting out his offspring, the demons, and removing his poisonous fangs one by one, until finally, Christ, the Offspring of Eve, crushed the serpent’s head with His own bloody heel. In that moment, Adam’s guilt was removed, and Eve’s sin atoned for.

² *Luther’s Small Catechism*, Confession, “Which sins are these [that we should confess]?”

³ Genesis 3:19.

But not just *their* guilt. Not just *their* sin. When He died on the cross, Jesus won forgiveness for them *and* 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.”⁴ 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, isn’t you for. But if you *are* just like them, a poor, miserable sinner, then you are like them in all the *other* ways, too: 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; and your shame is covered, not with garments of skins, but with the garments of salvation,⁵ with Christ Himself, put on you in your Baptism.⁶ By faith, you are not just children of Adam and Eve; you are just like them. The tempter for you has been overthrown, and you are a child of paradise.

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

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen.

SDG

⁴ Romans 5:18-19.

⁵ Isaiah 61:10.

⁶ Galatians 3:27.