

## Genesis 3:1-21 "The Birth of Death" Invocavit 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Everything in human experience has a beginning and an end. The sun rises, it also sets. We are born and we die. Every experience is bounded, at least in our experience, with a beginning, a start, a "once it wasn't but now it is" – and an end, a finish, a stopping, a "it used to be, but now it isn't." Nothing is forever. Nothing, that is, except God – and now, in Jesus Christ, the new and everlasting life which He pours out on us and which we receive by grace through faith.

Even death had a beginning. It seems strange to think of it that way. We tend to think of death as an end, not a "thing" or a "creature" that might have a beginning. But it is! Death was not part of the original design, nor is it simply one of those realities, those "facts of life", that is ubiquitous and unavoidable and so forth. The truth is that death is a "thing" in the eyes of God, and it has both a beginning and an end. The beginning of death – and of things dying, and of corruption, and decay – is in our text this morning. The end of death is in Jesus Christ, in His victory over sin and death and hell. He is the death of death. Our text this morning describes for us the Birth of Death.

Adam had been commanded not to eat of a specific tree. God had freely invited him to eat from every bush and tree in the garden – just leave the one in the center alone. Do not eat from it, for it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and on the day that you eat of it you will surely die! You have to admit that it was pretty simple, straight forward, and clear. Break this one rule and you will die, just like St. Paul says, millennia later, in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death."

Now Adam and Eve understood the concepts of good and evil– at least as much as a definition. What they lacked was the personal experience of evil. They knew about it like you know about spacewalking.

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We also know that they did NOT have a personal understanding of death at that point in time, because there was none yet. Nothing died. If they had not sinned, we would be able to find them and meet them, and see the 'famous' trees, and walk in the still fresh garden, probably on the same grass as they first walked on! It seems reasonable, however, to imagine that God gave them a conceptual understanding of death – or dying, otherwise, the threat of the commandment would have been empty and meaningless.

The Old Snake was tricky that day. Did you ever think about the fact that when we refer to someone as "a snake," we are doing so because of this encounter with the devil? He began, as the devil always begins, with the question: "Did God really say . . .?" He challenged and questioned the Word of God, and when Eve answered with the Word, he questioned her exegesis.

He started by suggesting that God and His Word were a little radical and unfair – God didn't really say that, did He?" To Eve's credit, she confessed what God had said. To her sorrow, she added to the Word. She said that God had forbidden even touching the fruit. In her answer, she revealed that she had accepted the devil's emotional premise that God was extreme and unfair, even while she supported the commandment as being from God. After that, she was like fruit, ripe for the picking.

The devil then questioned her understanding of the Word of God, and suggested that it didn't really mean what she thought, that it didn't apply to her the way it sounded like it applied, and that here was some advantage in disregarding God's clear Word and doing her own thing. I know, you probably think I am being silly about this – that it was disobeying the rules that was the problem, but it was not. The Law is never the real problem, it just makes the truth of our spiritual condition

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evident. Look at what God cursed Adam for: listening to the voice of his wife.

The consequent behavior of eating the forbidden fruit is also named, but the first problem was that Adam ignored God's Word in favor of someone else's. The problem was that her word was more authoritative for Adam than God's Word. How was he supposed to know that she was wrong? The same way you are to tell the true from the false – by turning to the Word of God. Adam listened to her words, and judged by what he saw and felt, and took the bite that doomed us all, and gave birth to death. Then God spoke the words spoken each year during the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday, "By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." These were the words of God which said, "You asked for it, and now you've got it. You are going to die." And Adam died spiritually – earned death and hell eternally – already.

And I imagine that they both felt it. Suddenly they were conscious of being exposed – naked. What they were feeling, although they did not understand it yet, was guilt and shame. It felt like, "Surely everyone can see that I have done that evil thing!" You all know the feeling, if you are honest with yourselves. It is the fear that somebody will see it, that somebody will uncover your secret shame. For them it came as the need to hide something, and that something was their bodies.

Then they heard God coming. God walked with them in the garden. It was a daily routine. They delighted in their communion with the heavenly Father. I suspect that when He walked with them, that He used a physical form, and it was probably the form the world would one day know as Jesus, but that much is pure speculation. They heard, and,

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they felt the grip of guilt and sin and death, even if they did not recognize what it was – although I suspect they did. They gave birth to death, on that day.

I am pretty sure that they knew it, because when God asked Adam “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”, Adam began the blame game. It was the woman – the one You gave me! He blamed God! – and Eve, of course. Eve, in turn, blamed the snake. God held everyone accountable.

The curse on the serpent, was aimed at the devil, and became a Gospel promise – the first Gospel promise – for us. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." It is wonderfully complete! It promises the coming Savior. It suggests the Virgin Birth (the seed of woman). It speaks of the unreasoning hostility of the world, of sinful man, toward Jesus and all that is His. It tells us that in the battle, the devil will strike, but not the fatal blow, and Jesus will utterly destroy the devil and all that is His. And Adam and Eve heard this curse on the serpent as the promise of divine intervention and salvation, just as you should. How do I know this? Chapter 4, verse 1. Eve gives birth to her first child, and she calls him “I have gotten a man, the Lord.” - that is what “Cain” meant. She was wrong in identifying the savior – talk about mistaken identity! – but she showed that she was believing God’s promise, and already looking for the One.

Well, the Savior came. He died, but rose from the dead, so the wound Satan administered was less than death and destruction. But by His death and rising to life again, He has put to death the devil and vanquished sin, and killed death once and for all! Your sins have been

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forgiven, and you have been given eternal life once again in your Baptism. We don't get to see it or feel it, just like the Tree did not look as deadly as it was, to Adam and Eve. God wants us to do what Adam and Eve did not, on that sorry day. He wants us to trust Him, to take Him at His Word, and believe.

He hasn't even put a tree before us, or any law. He tells us, instead, that He loves us. He proved that love by sending His Son to become one of us, live among us even though the sin of men and women must have been ever-so-offensive to Him in His holiness, and then to die for us. He told Adam and Eve, "You have life – over there is death, stay away!" He tells us, "You are dead, here is life! Listen to Me and take Me at my Word – and trust Me."

So, listen to the Word of God – and believe. Take heed, and take a warning from God's account of the birth of death.

Amen.