

## "Fleeing toward God" Genesis 3:1-21 Lent 1 2023

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

Martin Luther stated in his commentary on Genesis that immediately following the fall into sin the mere sound of rustling leaves on the evening breezes filled Adam and Eve with utter fear and terror. That's how far they had fallen. That's how totally divisive this fall from grace was. And it's true. Adam and Eve disobey and try to "fix" the problem of their naked and exposed shame by attempting to cover themselves, stitching together garments of fig leaves. Maybe God won't notice. But then we're told that they heard the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool breezes of late afternoon, and that's when they lost it. They took off in sheer terror, trying to hide themselves from their God and Father.

Now, there are MANY things we could say on this, and they'd all be good and right for us to meditate on too. Just consider how God does come to them after they sin. He doesn't come in a tempest of fire and brimstone and smoke and lightning, pouring out His righteous and terrifying fiery wrath upon them the very instant they disobey Him and sin against Him. Nope. He actually comes to them quite serenely, walking, almost strolling in the calm, cool breezes. He comes to them

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calling out very innocently and lovingly (like a parent playing hide-and-seek with their little one), "Where are you? Where'd you go?"

Already here our God and Lord is coming to His fallen children, not to drop the hammer and punish them, but in a very patient and gentle way that gives His beloved children opportunity to repent; opportunity to come to Him in contrition and sorrow and repent of their sins and call upon Him to be merciful (which He's already exhibiting in these actions). Sadly, their sinfulness blinds them to this merciful reality. As wise as they thought they were; as wise as they thought their disobedience would make them, their sin made them utterly stupid and terrified of God. Hearing God in the cool breezes and rustling leaves, they fled and hid in terror.

What a bunch of foolish rubes, right? And yet...as tragically foolish and sad as this fleeing from God in terror truly is, there is something here that they do get right and we fail miserably at: They are actually terrified by their sin. They get it. They know that their sin means eternal death and separation from their God and Father. They knew what perfection was like, and they knew all that they had just thrown away in a moment of arrogant pride, lust, and covetousness. They truly were ashamed of their sin, and they were utterly terrified to

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be in the presence of God with their deadly and sinful shame on full display.

How many of you can say that? Keep in mind: God knows the heart, right? God knows your heart better than you do. How many of you are truly ashamed of your sin? Understand: I don't mean ashamed that you got caught. I don't mean ashamed that others may know your dirty little secret. I mean truly ashamed because you have sinned against God. Does your sin terrify you? I didn't ask if it bothers you. I asked if it terrifies you. It should. The wage of sin is death, and God doesn't take sin lightly. Just look at this cross. God sent His only-begotten Son to pay that unpayable wage of sin. That's how serious God takes sin. God died for sin.

How often, though, we don't take our sin very seriously. Sure, it's a problem. It might even keep us up at night once in a while with feelings of guilt or regret. I know I'm not the only one who wishes I could go back in time and undo the stupid sins I've done. But I'll also admit that I don't exactly try to flee from God when I sin either. Sometimes I don't even feel ashamed of my sin. Everyone else is doing it, right? All this despite the fact that I know what God says about its deadly wage. In fact, there are plenty of times that I know something is a sin, and yet I willingly rush headlong into it, perfectly comfortable

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with the fact that I can just confess and repent later. I can do what I want right now, and God will forgive me. All I have to do is ask. It's simple. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that doesn't exactly sound like someone who is truly terrified of sin. That's cheap grace, nothing more. That's someone who either doesn't understand or believe what God says about the depravity of sin and the sweet injustice of His mercy, grace, and justification.

Now, here's the thing: Fleeing is not wrong. I don't want to give the wrong impression, as if we should follow Adam and Eve's example and flee from God. That's not at all what I'm saying. They did understand the reality of their sin, which caused them to flee. We could certainly learn something from that. But...we who stand on this side of Easter have something that Adam and Eve didn't have in those first terrifying moments when they heard God drawing near to them: We have the Gospel assurance that It Is Finished, once and for all in Christ Jesus and because of Christ Jesus. Fleeing is not the issue. The issue is: Where do you flee? To whom do you flee?

Again, I direct your attention to this cross. Look at this bloody corpse hanging upon this wretched, shameful instrument of criminality and punishment. According to God's Word (Leviticus), to be crucified (hung on a tree) meant that God had utterly forsaken you. You were

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considered to be cursed by God Himself. Jesus became that cursed and abandoned One...for us. He cries out from His bloody perch, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"

But...let that sink in. Despite being utterly forsaken and abandoned by His own heavenly Father, Jesus never loses faith. "If you really are the Son of God, prove it. Come down off that cross. Save yourself." Jesus doesn't take the bait. He doesn't flee from His selfless obedience to His Father. He doesn't flee from His heavenly Father and His holy will. Instead, He flees to and clings to His God and Father, even as He is passing through the valley of the shadow of death. In spite of all the pain and suffering and torment, God remains "My God."

And why is Jesus on this cross? Why did His own heavenly Father treat Him as accursed and despised? It wasn't because He had sinned, was it? No. Jesus endured all this suffering because of us and our sin. The innocent One became the curse in our place. The blameless One suffered our justly-deserved shame and punishment. The Lord of Glory utterly emptied Himself for us, becoming nothing—the lowest of the low—all so that we might inherit everything that our Lord has prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

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My friends: Here is your salvation. Here is your peace and assurance. Here is God's mercy and grace, lifted up and exalted for you and for all the world to see...and to turn and flee to and hold fast to in the joy of repentant thanksgiving. This is what Adam and Eve didn't know in those terrifying moments as God drew near to them. Here is the fulfillment of that first Gospel promise. By God's grace, through faith, we do know what this means, not just for us, but for all children borne of Adam.

And we know that this [the crucifix] isn't the end of the story. We know how the rest of the story goes. We know that He rose again three days later...just like He had promised. Death has no dominion over Him. We know that we have been baptized into His victorious death and His resurrection. His victory is our victory. Through Baptism, God has sealed us and marked us as His beloved children. Nothing and no one can ever take this away from us. We belong to Him. We also know that He continues to keep His Word and promise to abide with us always. Look no further than this altar. Your Lord continues to draw near to you in very humble and unassuming means. No fiery wrath. No heaven-rending lightning and blaring trumpets and war horses. Nope. Here is Christ, given and shed for you and your forgiveness.

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You know...when understand all this, how can you not want to flee here? When you understand all that God Himself gave up for you; when you understand how God didn't flee from you and your sin, but instead willingly came down into this fallen veil of tears in order to take on your flesh and crush the head of the serpent, sin, and death for you, how can you not want to flee here? Knowing all that Christ gave up for your sin, how can you not want to flee from sin, and instead flee in thanksgiving into the outstretched arms of Him who died for that sin?

Dear friends: Here is Christ, for you, for me, and for all who are weak and heavy-laden. As long as you are able to draw air into your lungs and repent of your sin, flee here, for here is your life, your joy, and your salvation. Amen.