

13 February 2005
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“It’s Not Fair!”

Text: Romans 5:12-19 (Genesis 3:1-21; Matthew 4:1-11)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

You know, that’s just not fair! *Adam* sinned, and *we* all have to pay the price! It’s not fair! You know how it goes, because this kind of thing happens all the time. Remember when you were in school, and one kid keeps talking and making noises when the teacher’s back is turned, what happens? You all have to stay after school! It’s not fair. . . . Or what if you’re part of a team project at work, and everyone does their part except for one person, and because he (or she!) didn’t do his part you don’t get the contract and you all miss out on raises! It isn’t fair, is it? . . . But that’s how things work in our world. And it isn’t always fair.

And so, as we heard in Romans, because Adam sinned, we all sinned. Because Adam sinned, we are not only born with sin, but conceived with sin. From the very first moment God creates a life in a mother’s womb, that life is corrupted with sin – the sin of Adam. That’s why there are birth defects. That’s why babies sometimes die in the womb. Because he has passed down his sin to us. And through all the generations that have lived since Adam, his sinful inheritance isn’t getting less and less, but more and more! Because we keep adding to it! Because sin isn’t just a theological concept, but something very real, something that corrupts and consumes, and the more time it has the more it corrupts and consumes . . . and it is corrupting and consuming you and me.

And so because of Adam, we didn’t even have a chance! We didn’t even have a *chance* to live the perfect life that God demands, because we were born sinful. And that’s not fair because – be honest! – we all have that little voice inside of us that thinks we could have done it, we might have been able to do it, if Adam hadn’t messed everything up for us! But now, because of Adam, even if you were able to live a completely perfect life and not sin – not even once! – from the moment you were born until the moment you died, you still wouldn’t be perfect! You still wouldn’t be “heaven-worthy” because

Adam's sin is running through your veins! It's in your blood. . . . So thanks a lot, Adam! Thanks a lot!

That's the bad news. The *good news* is that God's righteousness isn't fair either! That's also what we heard from St. Paul this morning in Romans: ***“Therefore, 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.”*** And so just as we did nothing to deserve the sin that was handed down to us, so too we did nothing to deserve the free gift of God's forgiveness and love. Adam earned for us the one, and Jesus earned for us the other.

And so in the Holy Gospel this morning, that is what we see – we see Jesus doing what Adam could not do and what we cannot do. We see Jesus resisting the temptations of the devil. *We see Jesus reversing the process.* And notice the similarities in the devil's temptations – from Adam to Jesus – only with Jesus intensified and magnified, because so much is at stake. And so first, Jesus is tempted with food, just as Adam. ***“Command these stones to become loaves of bread.”*** But how much harder for Jesus, for whereas Adam was tempted in the midst of plenty, in the midst of paradise, where there was no shortage of food but the best of everything, Jesus is tempted in the midst of nothing, while He was fasting, out in the wilderness, all by Himself. And how easy it would have been! *“Just say the word, Jesus! You who created everything that exists by simply your Word, surely using this power for yourself, in such difficult circumstances . . . God would understand!”* . . . What could be the harm in that?

Then second, Jesus is tempted with doubt, just as Adam. ***“Did God actually say . . .?”*** the devil hissed in the Garden of Eden, but how much harder for Jesus, where the devil doesn't just question God's Word, but quotes it too! He uses proof texts! *“You see, Jesus? You see, God says it right here! So show me! Show me how much of a Son you are! Show me how much you trust your Father!”* . . . What could be the harm in that?

And then third, Jesus is tempted with glory, just as Adam. For Adam, it was the promise that he would be ***“like God.”*** He would get something he didn't have before. But how much harder for Jesus, who is tempted with the possibility of bypassing the cross. *“Here – all the kingdoms and people and glory that you've come to win for God – I'll just give it to you, Jesus! You don't have to go to the cross! Just acknowledge that they all belong to me, and then I'll give them to you! OK? It's a good deal!”* . . . What could be the harm in that?

You know, on kind-of-a-side-note here, we get ourselves into more trouble by listening to

that little question of the devil, “*What could be the harm in that?*” Instead of listening to the harm that God tells us about, we rely instead on our own thinking, on our own wisdom, on what makes sense to us. And once we start listening to ourselves instead of relying on God and His Word, and thinking “Yeah! What could be the harm in that?” the devil’s trap is snapping shut on us and he’s got us! . . . But Jesus does not listen to the devil, because to listen to the devil is not to listen to God. To listen to the devil is to doubt God. To listen to the devil is to turn away from God and look to someone else besides God for what you need. And all of that is idolatry. And for Jesus to do that would have meant that Adam’s sin had won.

But Adam’s sin did not win! “***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.***” Or in other words: one man got us in this mess, and one man got us out! And there’s only one Man who could have gotten us out! . . . And that’s important because sometimes this story of Jesus’ temptation is taught as a “how-to” lesson – how to gain victory for yourself over the devil. How to overcome temptations by using God’s Word. That sounds good, and that may be what many people want to hear, but the truth is . . . that one Man who can defeat the devil, who can overcome his temptations . . . it ain’t us! What makes us think we could do better than Adam? Adam was without sin. Adam had pure and perfect fellowship with God. Adam lived in the Garden of Eden with God. And Adam still could not win when up against the devil! What makes us think we could do better? Or a better question: who is hissing in our ear, making us think we could do better? Wanting us out there on our own, vulnerable and weak? Wanting us out there on our own, where he can knock us down and devour us?

No, our readings for today are not to teach you how to do battle against the devil. Our readings for today are to show you the one Man who did do battle against the devil and won! The one Man we can rely on to rescue us from the devil! The one Man whose obedience takes our sin away and makes us righteous before God. The one Man we sang about in our opening hymn:

*With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is!*

And so while yes, we have Adam’s blood running through our veins, infecting us with his sin, and making us sinners from the start, that is not all we have in us! We also have the blood of the One who defeated the devil in us, as we come to His Table and eat His body and drink His blood . . . and we know whose blood is greater! It is the blood of Jesus that washes away all sin. It is the blood of Jesus that makes us righteous. It is the blood of

Jesus, shed on the cross for us, that gives us victory over the devil. . . . On our own, we can do nothing. But in Christ, we have everything! ***“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”***

And that's the thing . . . to always remember. Yes, our sin is serious. And yes, Adam's sin was serious. And yes, Adam's sin is running through our veins and making us sinners. And we are sinners. But just as Adam and what he did changed the course of your life, so Jesus and what He did changed the course of your life even more! And because of Him, we are forgiven. Because of Him, we are righteous. Because of Him, we have victory over death and the devil. And because of Him, we have the gift and promise of eternal life. . . . And you know, while Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted, while He was hanging on that cross dying, He didn't think about the fairness of it all, that He didn't deserve all of this! He thought rather of the gift that He was earning for you and me. And that is the gift that isn't fair! . . . but is ours by faith – faith in the one Man, who was in reality more than just a man, but also the very Son of God, come to undo what we did. Come to do what we cannot do! Come to save us once and for all!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.