

June 19, 2005
Pentecost 5

"Death through Adam but Life through Christ"

ROMANS 5:12-15

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-- ¹³ for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. ¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Why is there evil in the world? "Why can't we all just get along?" The sociologists tell us that man's inhumanity to man comes from animal instincts that still linger in the human race. The cat enjoys tormenting the mouse. Human beings enjoy tormenting each other because they are still in the evolutionary process of learning how to treat each other with greater kindness and respect. Give us enough time to grow up and get better. Then there will be a universal peace on this earth.

The ancient Greeks had a myth about how evil came into the world. They told the story of a woman named Pandora who was given a box with the instructions to never open the box. If she opened the box all sorts of evil would come into the world. She did not listen. She lifted the lid. That's how the Greeks believed sin entered the world.

The words just read to you give us God's answer on how evil or sin came into our world. "Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man." Adam's fall into sin passed sin down to all people." Adam was the fountain head or source of sin that makes people fight with each other and live lives unacceptable to the God. In contrast to this one sin of Adam we have Jesus who is the singular head and only source of perfection and righteousness before God. This morning we want to look at the amazing contrast drawn between the single one time act of destruction in Adam, and the single one time act of deliverance in Christ.

1) Death through Adam

Adam's one act of disobedience brought sin and death into the world. "Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all have sinned." Some have suggested that people do bad things because they are imitating other people doing bad things. "Birds of a feather flock together." If all evil came by association or imitation then there should be an equally large group of good people who flock together and help each other be good people alongside with a group of bad people who flock together in groups and support each other in doing evil. We just don't see that happening.

Why is that some people turn out to be such bad people, even though they are raised in a good environment? Adam and Eve were probably two of the best parents in the world, yet their first-born son Cain killed his brother Abel and turned out to be rotten to the core. Some of the evil you see in your behavior may have come from bad habits that others have passed down to you. However, most of the sin comes from within your heart that was polluted by Adam's fall. In Psalm 51 David confesses. "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Is it possible for a child to already be sinful in the womb of its mother? Yes, it is if you understand how Adam's sin was passed down to each of us. Death comes with sin, not just physical death, but eternal death and separation from God.

The Minnesota Crime Commission was not exaggerating when it wrote this about the human condition: "Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it--his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny these things and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless . . . He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist."

You can tell that all people have inherited Adam's sin because all will someday die as a result of that sin. Notice the argument Paul makes in 1st Corinthians 15:22 to show that all have been pronounced guilty through Adam. "For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as Adam did." The people from Adam to Moses did have specific commands from God such as do not eat from this tree, and they did not have the laws of God put down in the ten commandments, yet they died, giving evidence of the fact they were also corrupted by the fall. Have you ever read through the long list of names in Genesis 5? After the end of each name of the person who lived for a long time it says, "And he died."

The gray hair that is evident on some of our heads, the bodies that no longer function as well as they once did, the medical problems, all of these things are part of the process of dying because of the sin that was inherited from Adam. This sin causes us to die physically. It also messes us up inside so that we do bad things we do not want to do. It even leads us to foolishly think we can do good things to make up for the bad that has been done. This sin inherited from Adam leads us to think we can inherit eternal life and live forever based on our performance as one man said to Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Our Lutheran Confessions say this about original or inherited sin: "We believe, teach and confess that original sin is not a slight corruption of human nature, but that it is so deep a corruption that nothing uncorrupted has survived man's body or soul."

There was a Christian elderly man living alone after his wife had died. Every day he had breakfast at a nearby small restaurant where a waitress name Mildred enjoyed serving him. Their friendship grew, and this man felt compelled to talk to her about her need of Jesus and invite her to church. She said that she was already a good enough person

because of how she worked to support her family and helped people and took care of her ailing mother. Her corrupted, sinful nature, inherited from Adam led her to think that she could justify herself before God on the basis of how she lived her life. One morning this man asked Mildred for a special pancake, a large one, not flipped over, but gooey on one side. She protested serving him such a pancake, and so did the chef, but when it was brought to the table, nice and brown underneath, but gooey on top, the gentleman kindly said, "You see Mildred this is how you see yourself, lifting the underside of brown pancake. But then is how God sees you, and he pointed to the gooey side that no one would think of eating. When we look at ourselves as God sees us from Adam's fall we have to admit with the Apostle Paul, "There is none who does good, no not one."

2) Life through Christ

One man brought sin and death into the world. It was also one Man, one Man who was also Lord and Savior that brought life into the world. Adam was a pattern or type of the one to come. Adam looked like Jesus in the way he brought something into this world. Adam's one act of sin brought death to the world and it condemned the whole human race. Jesus one act of righteousness brought life into the world. In both cases I have no say in the matter. I am not in control. Adam did something bad for me. Jesus did something good for me. "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many?"

Maybe an illustration will help us appreciate the point Paul is making here. When I was about third grade, one of the students in our classroom started wearing glasses. Some of the kids teased him. One day he claimed someone had hidden his glasses to make fun of him. His mother backed him up and demanded that the teacher find out who was hiding his glasses. Morning recess. Noon recess. Afternoon recess. We had to sit inside, sit perfectly still in our desks until someone raised their hand and admitted to hiding this child's glasses. I remember sitting and fuming and thinking how unfair it was that I would be punished for something another person had done. You can imagine how we were even more upset when we found out three days later the boy found his glasses at home where he had set them aside and forgotten about them. Needless to say that boy was not the most popular kid in school for quite some time.

When we think of what one singular act of Adam did to us, and how he opened up the world to sin, and passed that sin and condemnation down to every person who ever comes into this world, it is easy to become upset and say to God, "That just is not fair." I already have three strikes against me before I ever come out of my mother's womb. But then all these thoughts of unfairness go away when we contemplate the one singular act of kindness and goodness that Jesus did eradicate and remove this problem of sin so we could have blessings far greater than Adam ever lost. "How much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ overflow to the many."

When I see this word "overflow" which is a good literal translation of the Greek word used here, I think of "Old Maud." Old Maud was an oil well about a half mile south of here in the Orcutt hills that was one of the largest gushers in the history of the oil industry. For weeks Old Maud shot crude oil up in the air, which they were able to capture with a series of dams. You know that if you started digging around the hills, or trying to develop homes,

you would never be able to get all the crude oil out of the ground. In a way Old Maud is a picture of Adam's sin, a real gusher if you will, that has polluted the whole human race. But then God sent his Son Jesus to be one time answer to this problem of sin that grossly pollutes every human heart. What if you could invent a machine that you put over the old oil fields, and it pulled every molecule of oil for miles around and then simply destroyed it without polluting the air? Jesus did that. There was time and moment in history when the sin of the world was placed on him, when he even became sin for us. "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more."

Because of that one act of kindness, every thing done by Adam's act of rebellion has been completely reversed. Instead of death we have life that starts now with the Lord and goes on forever into eternity. Kids need to learn that message. That's why dads are so important and why we pray for them on this Father's Day. That is why we have our Bible camp this week with the theme of Building on the Rock. We pray the Lord will bring us kids we can teach about the life they have in Jesus, even though they were born dead through Adam. Amen.