

“To Have a God”

Adam & Eve ate the forbidden fruit. So, what’s the big deal? Taking a bite from an apple seems pretty harmless. And what does this event that took place long, long ago have to do with me? Don’t we have better things – more important things – more pressing things – to focus on?

Dearly beloved, Genesis 3 has a profound effect on your day to day life. Eating the forbidden fruit is a big deal. It’s not harmless. It’s deadly for Adam and Eve. Their disobedience has brought sin and death to all people.

Do you have a loved one who has died? It leads back to Genesis 3. Do you fight with your parents, struggle with your spouse, frustrated with co-workers? Yes, that’s right – it all flows from Genesis 3. To put it in the simplest of terms – it’s a First Commandment issue.

You know the First Commandment – “You shall have no other gods before me.” You know the Small Catechism meaning – “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” But, do you know the context in which the Lord gives this commandment?

In Exodus 20, He prefaces the First Commandment by saying – “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” The First Commandment is about a Lord who delivers and saves His people.

But in that context, He also says – “I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

He is a jealous God who does not want you to follow any other god because they cannot save you. He is a righteous God who punishes sin, so we should fear His wrath, and not disobey His commandments. He is a loving God who promises grace and every blessing, therefore, we should love and trust Him.

In the Large Catechism, Dr. Luther tells us what it means to “have a god.” “A ‘god’ is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the one true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.” (K-W, 386)

To “have a god” is a matter of faith and trust. What your hearts holds onto is your god – but that doesn’t mean that your God is the one, true God – the God who punishes sin – who delivers and saves sinners by His grace.

Back in Genesis 3, before the First Commandment was chiseled in stone – Adam and Eve feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things – and along comes the devil, playing God, tempting Adam and Eve to “fear, love, and trust” in him above all things.

“Did God really say?” is the temptation. You’ve got nothing to FEAR – “You will not surely die.” Look at the fruit of that tree, isn’t it LOVE-ly to the eye, and “good for food.” TRUST me, the devil says. God is lying to you – “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

And Adam and Eve ate – and “sin came into the world ... and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ...”

Or, as James writes in his epistle: “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (1:14-15)

This is why your loved ones have died – and you will too, one day. All because Adam and Eve, and WE do not “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

This is why the Son of God took on human flesh and was born into this world – to do what the one man, Adam, failed to do. He comes to take the place of all mankind – to live in perfect obedience – “to fear, love, and trust in God [His Father] above all things.”

This is what St. Paul is talking about in the Epistle reading, when he says – “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.”

For your justification, God sent His only-begotten Son to die for you. He is the One anointed by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism for this redeeming work – and it is that same Holy Spirit who leads Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus, the Son of God, comes in human flesh because He comes to save all mankind. He is lead into the wilderness and is tempted – because you live in the wilderness of this world, continually being tempted and led into sin. Jesus takes your place and is tempted like you are – in every way – and yet, remains faithful, and does not sin.

You know the temptations – the desires of your flesh – to live for pleasure, to live for self. “Are you hungry Jesus? Feed yourself, turn these stones into bread.” The devil’s words are tempting – but Jesus fears, loves, and trusts in His Father above all things – He lives “by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

You know the temptations Jesus faced – to prove yourself. You know the lure of the kingdoms and glory of this world. “Be like God,” the devil tempts – trust yourself – let everyone worship you.” “You will not surely die.”

Dearly beloved, in this wilderness, surrounded by temptation, sin and death – God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, is with you – to lead you to your heavenly home. In this wilderness He gives you to eat from His Tree of Life – His Body and Blood, which not only forgives your fall into sin, but strengthens you against the temptations of the evil one – living by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

He stands with you before your heavenly Father – as your perfect obedience – so that you are holy and righteous in God’s eyes. Indeed, in Christ, you are one who fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.