

St. Paul: On The Same page

02.30.14 for Lent 1a

Day One: Genesis 3:1-21

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,"³ but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die."⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die."⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Is it wrong to want to be like God? Of course it would not be wrong to want to be holy, and wise, and loving.

But what does our enemy do? From the start he takes good things, even things like wisdom, knowledge, and holiness, and twists them. He takes our desire for good things and he twists it ever so slightly so that it is a desire that is out of place, a longing that is now out of proportion.

"Look! The sin is so very tiny, and the reward is so very great. Why not take a bite of fruit if the reward is to be like God?!" I can easily

imagine more such persuasive words. I've heard them, spoken them to myself, often enough.

Our desire for food is a good thing, even chocolate! God created it. He gave us a sense of taste that is not only able to identify nutritious things, but also to be able to savor and rejoice in thousands of delicious flavors. But what happens to us when our desire grows out of proportion?

Our desire for intimacy, for sexual gratification, for attention, for friendship, all of those are good. They are a part of God's created order in their proper place. But each one of them has the power to devastate us.

We do not live in the garden like Eve, but we face the same temptation. Our enemy fools us in the same way. The key is for us to learn to recognize his voice, and to learn to listen to our Father's voice.

What is whispered in your ear today? And what is God's voice saying?

Prayer: *Father, I hear no end of voices pulling me this way or that. Help me to know your voice, and follow you. Amen.*

Day Two: Romans 5:12-19

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ...so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

"How much more..." That's a big phrase in this passage. It's like a comparison between the moon and the sun. The moon seems so much larger to us, but the sun is really 400 times larger and 450,000 times brighter than the moon.

Your sins look so large. Late at night, when you are considering the results of your words and deeds, they seem huge. Those of others who have offended us may look even bigger than ours. And the sins of all the world,

the evil things that people have done to one another, the suffering and misery that we have inflicted, the death and destruction over the centuries, is almost too much to think about. But what is largest?

"The free gift is not like the trespass." The sin is terrible, but God's grace is more terrible still. God's grace offers a vastly greater sacrifice than the size of our debt. And one man's obedience, all the way to death, results in all the world's sins being washed away.

Who can picture a comparison like that? I saw a science teacher complain that diagrams of the solar system are all wrong. If the sun is shown the size of a grapefruit, the furthest planet would be like a single pea a half mile away. If this is true of our solar system, which is small in the universe, how would you picture God's love for you?

Only the cross can show it.

Prayer: *Dearest Savior, your love for me is so large, so much larger than my sin. Let it fill me and overflow from me to others, to wash away their sin too. Amen.*

Day Three: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Once again, Satan's temptation strategy follows the old pattern. He offers a good thing. A genuinely good thing. Bread is good, and it was certainly God's will for Jesus to be able to eat and be nourished. But Satan offers a good thing in a bad way - and that makes all the difference.

If Jesus gives in to the temptation to create bread and eat, his action would not be wrong in and of itself, but it would be wrong because of when/how/why he did it.

He would be doing more than satisfying his hunger. He would be trusting in bread to prove his own value, to demonstrate his identity. He would be serving his own purpose instead of the Father's.

That might seem like a pretty small difference to you. Think of it this way. When aiming a rifle, it is only a very tiny movement that can make the difference between life and death. Satan was changing Jesus' target.

In response, Jesus poses a comparison. Like Paul in the epistle lesson where he compares our sin with God's grace, Jesus is concerned not just with what is, but with what is best.

Bread is good, but God's word is better. Food that strengthens the body is good, but food that gives life to the soul is better. Bread that satisfies a gnawing hunger is good, but a food that fills up an empty heart is better.

How much better? It is so much better that it would be death to choose the lesser good. It would fill our stomach for a day, but leave us eternally empty.

What food does Satan offer you? What seems to satisfy your momentary need? And what does Jesus hold out for you instead?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, make me hungry for the very best food, and then fill me up. Amen.*

Day Four:

Empty Calories

Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ⁹For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.
Psalm 107:8-9

My wife often complains about my food choices. She says that too many of them have empty calories.

How can a calorie be empty? It's pure energy, right? If I drink a can of pop, I have just filled my tank with 12 ounces of high octane energy! It will keep me going for... several minutes at least. And if I swallow a large chocolate bar filled with delicious nougat (whatever that is) and caramel and nuts, I get yummy protein and fat that will burn even longer!

Good stuff. There's just one problem. Although I eat when I feel like I need more energy, my body needs more than just energy. My body needs materials that will repair its broken parts and keep it running well, just like a car needs not only more gas, but also oil and tires and brake pads and lots of other things.

What does your spirit need? When your spirit is running on empty, when you are spiritually hungry or thirsty, you might feel a need for more happiness. You crave being cheered up. You might think that pleasure or excitement is what you need to fill up your tank. Many who are spiritually starving think that they need sex, or they need a high adrenalin sport, or they need a party. Worse, they may think they need a drink. But those things are like sugar or caffeine. They give a brief sense of satisfaction, but they do not fill our emptiness.

Your spirit, like your body, needs to be in right alignment towards God. Your spirit needs those parts that have been broken by sin to be repaired. It has connections that have been severed and need to be regrown.

It is God's word and sacraments that your spirit needs. This is where he has promised to feed you. Why are you still hungry?

Prayer: *Dear Savior, I hunger, but I forget the Bread of Life. Feed me and restore me. Fill me up with your Spirit, by your word. Amen.*