

Genesis 3:1-15

Lent 1, Supplement Series A, March 5, 2017

Theme: The Devil desires our downfall
I. Do we doubt God's love?
II. Does shame cloud God's saving promise?

INJ We are newly acquainted with the term "fake news." We used to call it "spin" or "finesse" when the tactics were not as obviously employed. Now, the author of the piece blatantly expresses an opinion and chooses any information that fits, while ignoring what doesn't. They hope to make you agree with their perspective. "Fake news" isn't necessarily made up details, but it is selective reporting for a political purpose.

Maybe news reporting has always been like that, and we are just now noticing. In any case, there is a parallel to our lives of faith. In the account of the fall into sin we see the Devil use "fake news." He twisted and shaped his message to lead Adam and Eve away from the LORD their God. I hope we can recognize that the Devil desires our downfall. His devious plans are that we doubt God's love, and that our shame clouds God's saving promise. The tactics of the Evil One have not changed through the years to today. He is always spinning fake news about God so we fall away from him.

Adam and Eve were placed into a beautiful garden sculpted from a perfect creation. Picture it lush and green, with colors and textures that tingled the senses and touched the imagination. Everything was there, including a close relationship with the Creator. They were in complete harmony in thoughts and desires, and nothing interrupted the joy.

God even gave the man and his wife a beautiful opportunity to worship with thankfulness. One tree in the entire universe was off limits to them. They would show their trust and obedience by not eating the fruit of this tree. Of course they would stay away, just because the LORD God said so! They wanted to praise him this way. God's warning was a good word. "The day you eat of it, you will surely die!" How happy they were to listen to God's Word.

But then came the Devil, who desired the downfall of perfect Adam and Eve. What was his tactic? Make them doubt that God's Word is really good for them. Insert into their trusting hearts a bit of fear, some uncertainty, an interest in what God didn't give them.

It started with fake news. "Did God really say that you cannot eat

from any tree in this entire Garden? Is he that cruel and mean that he would put you here and not let you have what is right in front of you? What kind of a God is he? It certainly looks to me like he is unreasonable!"

Eve parried the attack by returning to what God actually said. "Every tree is available to us, except this one tree. God promised that we would die if we ate from that one." It was a good defense. Similar to the way the Lord Jesus countered the Devil's attacks in the Gospel today. "Your fake news will not deceive me! I know what God has said and that is what I believe and do."

The Devil desires our downfall by the same temptation. Is God being unreasonable when he tells us to worship him in eager thankfulness and generous joy? Is it cruel that he tells us to stay away from sexual impurity, from violence, and from hating our neighbor? Has he taken away everything that is good when he guides us with his word? When he tells us to fear, love, and trust in him above all things, is that bad? The Devil wants us to think the LORD God is mean by what he says in his word.

And we fall for his fake news. We get to thinking, "Why doesn't God let me do whatever I want to do? What is he doing, telling me I can't?" We puff up with pride and demand that we get our way. "If you loved me Lord, you would let me..."

Do we doubt God's love? Go back to his word. There he revealed a love that sent his Son to substitute for sinners. God's love took action to remove the curse of death we deserve. God isn't mean, but he is gracious. Go back to God's words to deflect the temptations of the Devil.

Not that the Evil One will stop trying to tear you away from your God. To Adam and Eve the LORD had threatened death for disobedience. Directly contradicting him, the Devil said, "You certainly will not die." Then came the spin. "God is hiding good things from you. When you disobey his command, you will get treasures you cannot even imagine. It will be so great! You will be just like God, who is holding you back by telling you not to eat this fruit. You will have the freedom and power that you deserve – and it comes when you do what God forbids."

The fake-ness sounds obvious when Eve is the one hearing it. When you are under pressure, it is harder to remember God's love. Look at that off-limits fruit. It isn't ugly or yucky. It doesn't smell bad. In fact, it looks tasty and sweet. Why would the LORD keep such a juicy fruit from me? Maybe he is hiding something. Maybe he doesn't want me to have the good things he is hoarding for himself. I kind of want to find out. I desire to be like God, knowing good and evil. It isn't fair that I only know what is good!" And we eat forbidden fruit just like Eve and Adam.

Go back to the clear words of God for a moment. Has God ever kept good things from us? No. He extends his protecting hand to keep evil away. He showers blessings on us that we in no way deserve. Even in ways we cannot see and do not understand, he has expressed his unconditional and unearned love to us. James says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights." He does not give us evil, but good things. Do we doubt his love?

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit God forbade them to eat, they died, just like he had promised. They died, not physically from poison so their bodies stopped breathing, but they died spiritually. The perfect communion they had with holy God was shattered. Now there was a knowledge of good and evil, alright – but it wasn't the glorious thing the Devil had presented. The knowledge of good was long gone, and the joy of perfection was only a memory. The knowledge of evil was a constant curse, and every moment they lived it.

The way God has revealed that dramatic change to us is by telling us that Adam and Eve realized that they were naked. They were ashamed of the very bodies which God had given them! Fig leaves formed a covering for themselves. Trees became a way to hide from the LORD when he came in the cool of the day. Shame was the problem. They had done what is evil.

Maybe God wouldn't notice! See how far they had fallen – not even their reasonable thought worked right. Hide from the all seeing God? Hope that he won't notice the obvious rebellion of his creation? Yet we fall into the same pattern. When the LORD comes to us after we have sinned, we also want to hide. Our shame consumes us, and we recognize how small and naked we are before the mighty God.

I want you to notice, though, that when the LORD God comes to wretched Adam and Eve, his word is not one of judgment and wrath, of fire and brimstone. His word is one of promise. He seeks repentance. He reveals his saving plan. Not what we expect, is it? God's Word is always good. It calls to us so we come out of our hiding and face our guilt. Face to face with the LORD God we see that he is not mean. He does not torture us. He doesn't even hide from us his promise. He sent a Savior!

Reluctant Adam tried to blame God for his sin. "This woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit." It wasn't so much the woman's fault, but God's. If he hadn't given this exactly perfect helper to him, Adam would have been better off? Eve's excuse was similar: "That snake you created deceived me. If you hadn't provided a perfect garden with all that glorious stuff in it!" See how shame clouds God's saving promise!

I would have blown up at these two sniveling sorry sinners for

blaming me for their own corruption. The LORD God didn't. He spoke the first promise of a Savior to them. "I will put hostility between you [Devil] and the woman [Eve], and between your [devil's] seed and her seed [between unbelievers and believers]. He [a singular and specific descendant of Eve] will crush your head [Devil], and you will crush his heel [a total defeat for the Evil One and a painful injury for the Deliverer]."

Does our shame cloud God's saving promise? The sins we commit are disgusting to God. They cut us off from communion with him, and they leave us for dead. But the LORD God has come with his powerful word to call us to repentance. To lead us to see our sin, and to look at the Savior he has provided. The Descendant of Eve came, Jesus, to crush the head of the Devil. He is defeated and done! We don't have to somehow escape his wiles, our God has delivered us from him!

The LORD has removed our shame as well. God has declared us to be not guilty in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. We were washed in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. We have put on the righteous holiness of our Savior by faith. We receive Holy Communion, the restoration of peace with God in the Sacrament. Your sins are forgiven! Yes, it happened by the crushing of Jesus' heel. His crucifixion was painful and cruel, but it accomplished our salvation. Here are the very body and blood! Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim the victory to us. We are his dear children.

When the Devil comes again to lure you away into disastrous downfall, go back to God's sure words. He has given you every good gift in his Son. He even gives you your daily bread. He holds back nothing from his storehouse of bounty! You have no reason to doubt his love.

When you do doubt, when you have fallen into great and shameful sins, come back to the gracious promise of your Savior. He comes to you not with fire and brimstone, but with complete forgiveness and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. These words of God are your comfort and your joy. He clearly and boldly proclaims to you his victory over sin and Satan. Not even shame need cloud his promise.

Left to ourselves we would fare no better than Adam and Eve. Fake news would mislead us and shame would consume us. We don't stand a chance against the old Evil Foe! But God sent his Son to crush Satan's head. Yes, his heel was also crushed, but Jesus rose from the dead. You are not at the mercy of the Devil, for Jesus is your Champion. Stand firmly on God's Word. Trust that the LORD himself has accomplished your salvation. The Devil desires your downfall, but the LORD gives you the victory in Christ Jesus our Lord. SDG Amen.