

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity: July 26, 2020
“Why? Why? Why?”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Old Testament reading, especially these words, **“Genesis 2:15-17.”**

Curious words. I often find myself reading these words and becoming like a young child again and playing the why game. You know what that is. Novel, honest curiosity fills the wide eyes of children and they want to know everything. It doesn't take long before you realize just how little you know and much you have forgotten. Why is grass green? Why is water wet? Why do we have to go to church? Why does pastor wear that? Why is grandma sick? Why does dad have hairy knuckles, and on and on the whys go until you finally say, “I don't know. Go ask your mother.”

Theological why questions are what I live for, my sister's favorite answer to the why questions about the Bible is, “You should ask Uncle Joel.” Confirmation kids are great, because they are not afraid to ask questions. We have some of the greatest conversations, simply because they want to learn, and I love to read. I think it is safe to say that they have taught me many things over the years.

Our Old Testament text gets me to ask why? I have many questions that stem from this text. Now to be fair, Adam doesn't ask the question. We do, because we don't have the perfect knowledge of God, knowing Him as He wanted to be known. We have original sin that corrupts our knowledge of the Holy One, and so we hear these words differently than Adam did.

God places Adam in the Garden of Eden, and tells Adam not to eat from a specific tree. Adam can eat from any tree of the Garden, except one; and if he eats from that one certain specific tree, he will die. It is important to remember that this is before Eve has been created from Adam's side. There are three parts to our reading this morning: the creation of Adam, the plating of the Garden of Eden, and the command not eating from the tree.

Now the first part is simply historical knowledge. The Garden no longer exists, as it was destroyed by the flood. The geography is changed after the flood. Before the flood, it seems as though there was one continent. The description of the Garden teaches us this, because the four rivers that flow to or around the various lands are not all on the same continent.

We are not exactly sure where the land of Havilah is, but the river that is known as Pishon, which Genesis says flows around it, is today called the Ganges River, found in India. The Gihon flows around Cush, which is modern day Ethiopia, which means that the Gihon would be the Nile, and the Nile does not flow around Ethiopia. The Tigris and the Euphrates are also known rivers today, except that the Tigris in Eden flows to the east of Assyria, and the Tigris we know today flows on the west side of Assyria. In short, these rivers, which all have their origin in Eden, identify rivers and places on three continents today, and they do not all share a common source today, as they did in the times of Eden, when the Bible tells us there was only one continent, and only one sea. The Flood changed the earth's geography, and any attempt to say exactly what it looked like before the flood is a simple exercise in futility.

The second and third parts of our text are bit more useful for us. You cannot know who you are unless you know from where you came. With the current cancel culture, where the movement is to destroy all reminders of the past, topple monuments, and erase history, there is no concept of forgiveness. Everyone is out for their pound of flesh, and any small sin, no matter how small, is enough for a person to be completely written off from doing anything good at all for anyone in society. In a strange way, if you think about it, there is an opening in the mission field. There is a strong concept that being perfect is the only acceptable state of being. The problem is we all sin, and so perfection in our own self will never be found.

History is important. It shapes our understanding. If you think that your ancestors are animals, it makes perfect sense that you will see yourself as an animal. Not just see yourself, but you will then justify your thoughts, words, and deeds as simply just being instinctive, being driven by primal, innate, deep seated desires in your genes that you cannot fight against. If you come from an animal, you will think like an animal, act like an animal, live and die like an animal.

On the other hand, if you think that God formed you to be a human being, not an animal, it then makes sense that you have a different moral obligation and a different set of expectations. You are held to and live by a different set of standards.

If you believe that God not only created you, but became flesh and blood to die for you, and through Holy Baptism, by faith, you are made His child, then it makes sense to see that His blood justifies you. His work saves you, not your own. Instead of living and dying like an animal, you see that you live and die as a child of God.

To know from where you come makes a huge difference. I know the smoke-screen that gets blown in your face from the world. They know that you cannot understand a couple hundred years, as a very few people barely live past 100 years. The world knows that 100 years is beyond the scope of experience for many, and so it boggles the mind to throw out numbers like billions and billions. The world attempts to make you feel stupid or ignorant if you don't open your mind enough to see that anything is possible over that length of time. I also know of the arguments that say we share various traits with animals at the zoo, but what they won't talk about is what the differences are, and just how important those differences are.

When listening, it is important to ask the question, why. Why are some so bent on getting us to believe that we came from animals? The doctrine that we evolved from the animals was invented by people who want to get rid of the evidence that God made this world. If God made the world then God made them, and if God made them then they are accountable to Him. They want to live as they please without being accountable to their Creator. The doctrine that we evolved from the animals is anti-Christian propaganda. This is why the most deceptive form of this false doctrine is that which pawns itself off as Christian. You've heard it, I am sure. So called Christians teach that we descended from animals, but somehow God was involved. They say that yes, we evolved over millions and millions of years from some primitive life form, but God directed the process. That way, they can promote godless doctrine while pretending that they are honoring God.

Don't be fooled. The teaching that we evolved from the animals is impossible to reconcile with the Christian religion. The proof is right in our text this morning. God created Adam in a unique way. All other creations were simply "spoken" into existence. God designed them with His omniscient wisdom, doing so with great complexity, and yet when they were created, the creation is spoken of as merely "**saying**" "**let there be . . .**", and they sprang into existence according to the wisdom and plan of God's own design. Man alone is spoken of as being "**formed**" by God.

How He did it, and precisely what the differences are, we cannot say with certainty. The human body shares a great many design features with other creatures. That makes sense. If you build it to live in the same environment, and eat the same sorts of foods, you can use similar design features. Why "re-invent the wheel" each time, so to speak?

Man's creation, however, was different, by design. God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the "**breath of life,**" and man became "**a living being.**" The word for "breath" is also the word for "**spirit.**" God gave man unique physical attributes, and unique mental abilities. Unlike animals, man has a soul. He is created in the image of God. He speaks with words, just like God. He knows God as God wants to be known, because He can comprehend the Word of God. The eternal word of God is joined to man, and by the work of the Spirit, man has a living soul. What makes a man a man is a body and soul. One doesn't make much sense without the other, and in fact, is incomplete without the other. This is why we talk about heaven, but look forward to the resurrection. This is why baptism and the hearing of God's Word and reception of His Supper is important, because man will either live forever or die forever.

The words spoken by God are a matter of life and death; not just of the body, but also of the soul. God does not say, "If you eat of it, your flesh will die." No, He says, "***in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.***" The Scriptures have taught us that this eternal death is what we call hell - torment and suffering of body and soul, and complete and final and lasting separation from God, who is the source and fountain of life.

The will of God towards man was good and was about life and communion; that means an active participation together involving words and actions, there is sharing and conversation. Look again at the Garden. It was filled with beauty and food, readily and freely available. "**And out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food.**"

Sin is mankind's rejection of God. God told Adam what would happen. When Adam avoided the tree, he knew by personal experience what "Good" was and what it was to be good. When he ate from the tree, he learned what evil was, and what it was to be evil. Why not this tree? Because now Adam as the knowledge of good and evil, and knows that he cannot do anything on his own to un-ring the bell, so to speak.

What is spoken cannot be undone. What is seen cannot be unseen. What is eaten cannot be uneaten. What is disobeyed, cannot be turned back in time and started over again. Sin has been committed. Payment must be rendered.

Adam's sin was unbelief. God warned him about the tree, but Adam ate anyhow, not trusting God or believing His Word. As unbelief always does, it caused sin. The lack of trust in God and in God's Word caused Adam to sin.

Our sins are also the products of unbelief – fruits of original sin. If you are going to not listen to anyone who has ever made a mistake of any kind, you are never to going to listen to anyone, including yourself. The only One then to whom we should listen is Jesus, the sinless one; but because we don't trust God, we steal, or we lie, or we gossip. We see the world around us going off the rails, and we ask why? Why does this stuff keep happening? We see our bodies breaking down, our spouses and children and grandchildren being more burdens than blessings, and we ask why? Why doesn't God work good and give blessings the way I want it? It's my life and I want it now! We don't trust God to be good to us, or to work all things for good as He promised, so we take control. We do what we should not do, or say things that we know we ought not to say.

Like Adam, when we sin, we are rejecting God in favor of ourselves or someone else. When we reject God in sin, we step away from that fountain and source of life. That is why you shall surely die. Sin breaks the connection between the sinner and Life itself. It doesn't break the chain of existence. That is why we face an eternity of death. As Jesus says, what we deserve because of our sin is to be separated from God in the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Why? Sin does that. My sin does that. Your sin does that. That is why the Gospel is so precious! We are created by God. We are not animals. Jesus took on human flesh, not the flesh of a feline. He was a human man, not man's best friend. As a human man, He did surely die for all those who will surely die. This was set before the foundations of the world, and God knew all along.

In our sin, we have sold ourselves into death and God has every right to cancel us; but He did not. Instead, God redeemed us. He literally bought us back again, by the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He did not give gold or silver, it wasn't enough for you. He gave Himself; His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He who is Life itself bore your sins to the cross and endured your death for you.

You are not an animal. Why? God has made you different. You are one with Him in the waters of baptism. All who know the truth and trust God and believe the promises of forgiveness and resurrection and life everlasting, God pours out upon them all of those blessings. Even for those who do not believe, God extends His gracious hand, as He richly and daily provides with all that is needed to support this body and life.

Forgiveness and life and salvation have been won for all people everywhere, but it is received and possessed only by those who believe, *by grace you have been saved through faith.*

And just as God gave Adam all sorts of good things in the Garden, He gives us good things here and now. He has given us His Word, to teach us and through which He works within us. He has given us one another to love, and to support and encourage one another. He has given us this holy Meal. Here He feeds us with the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He hides those very real treasures under the form of the bread and wine, but it is by the power of His Word and command that they are really there. It is just as it was in the Garden. The fruit of the forbidden tree did not look deadly. Adam could not see the danger and death that lurked beneath the form of the fruit. Just so, we cannot see the life and health and forgiveness and blessing that lie hidden by the forms of the bread and wine, but it is by the Word and promise of God that those blessings are truly there—forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

Without those two blessings, you shall surely die, but you are never without those blessings with the Gospel! God gives them to you in your Baptism. He pours out His grace upon you in the absolution, and in the sermon. He feeds you with the bread of life. Over and over again, God pours out grace and forgiveness and life and salvation upon those who believe.

You will surely die; yet, I remind you from last week, *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”*

Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer of the Church
Seventh Sunday after Trinity
26 July 2020**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Remember, Lord, Your promise to be a rock of refuge for Your baptized children. Be gracious to us. Create in us humble and contrite hearts, that we might always cry out to You for mercy. Fill us with Your love. Grant us renewal by Your Holy Spirit, that we may always abide in Jesus Christ, our Savior, beholding His glory in His Holy Word and Sacraments and being made well by the same. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, Your promise to send workers into Your vineyard. Remember also all those whom You have already sent. Make Your face shine on them so that, through their faithful service, the eyes of those blind to Your mercies may be opened to see the salvation they have in Jesus Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, our nation and its leaders. Guide them in the direction You would have them go, that peace and prosperity, truth and justice, religion and piety may dwell in our land. Remember also those who serve in our armed forces and law enforcement, stretch forth Your hand to protect them from harm and grant that they would serve with integrity and honor. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, those who celebrate another year of earthly life. Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Ty and Duane* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, the elderly and shut-in. Provide them with compassionate and loving caregivers, and bless the nursing homes throughout our land. Remember, Lord, those who are sick, hospitalized, in treatment, undergoing surgery or recovering, and all who are in need physically, emotionally, or spiritually [*especially Carmen, Susan, Marvin, Zoey, and those we name in our hearts*]. Comfort them with Your presence, sustain their faith through Your gracious promises, and bring healing to them as You will and know to be best. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, those who come to the holy altar this day to receive the medicine of immortality in the Holy Eucharist. Fill all who partake of Your Son's very body and blood with His life and love, that they may depart in His peace, which surpasses all understanding. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, Your promise to fill the wedding banquet of Your Son and His Bride, the Church, with guests clad in white robes. For those who have gone before us and now rest from their labors, we give You thanks and praise. Bring us, with them, to the day of our Lord's glorious return, that we may all receive the eternal inheritance You have prepared for us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**