

Seventh Sunday after Trinity: July 31, 2022
“Beautiful Bond”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God records through His servant Moses this early historical record for us, ***“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”¹***

With great care and love God created and placed man in close connection with all things. Woman was taken from the innermost inner being of Man; often translated as rib, and the word has a much deeper and intimate understanding. Formed from the dust of the ground, man’s name highlighted his connection with creation itself. *Adamah* being the word for ground and the first name given to man was Adam. Not only is man deeply connected to creation, but also God breathed His own breath into this creation. It is not simply words that bring to life, but all three persons of the Trinity are clearly identified in the creation of man.

What does this mean? It means there is much more behind God’s proclamation that it truly is not good for man to be alone. If left to our own devices, sinful, deadly, wicked ways manifest themselves with almost unchecked tenacity. The simple command from God this morning is recorded for us and put before us again, ***“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”²***

You know how that historical record continues in Genesis 3. Man wants what he cannot have. Instead of focusing on and giving thanks for the many gifts we have been given, we seek to obtain those things we don’t have.

¹ Genesis 2:7–9

² Genesis 2:16–17

Instead of being satisfied in God's overflowing gifts, we labor and toil to the point of fainting for bread that is fleeting. We remove ourselves from the company of His Church or the company of others, because we would rather live our own lives and speak our own words.

Of all the trees in the Garden, God highlights two, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. An Early Church Father captures the connection very succinctly, "There is a deep meaning in the passage of Scripture that tells how God in the beginning planted a tree of knowledge and a tree of life in the midst of paradise, to show that life is attained through knowledge. It was because the first men did not use this knowledge with clean hearts that they were stripped of it by the deceit of the serpent. For there cannot be life without knowledge any more than there can be sound knowledge without genuine life. So the two trees were planted close together."

There is a closeness, a harmony, word and deeds are bound together; so important is this bond that Jesus taught us to pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name." What does this mean? God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also. *How is God's name kept holy?* God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

This labor is not an easy task, because the perfect harmony between man and creation is corrupted with sin. In Eden, Adam and Eve received food from Jesus' gracious hand apart from any burdensome work. To be sure, Adam was to work the ground and put it to use for himself. But his labor, if it could be called "labor," would've been easy and successful. Any task he would've put his hand to, the Lord would have blessed and granted success, causing it to yield a hundredfold. But the fall changed and destroyed that.

Now man would work the ground and his labor would be hard. He would sweat and bleed. He would work his hands raw and have nothing to show for it. The ground was cursed because of him. He himself, taken from the ground, was cursed. He would toil, labor, and, finally, die.

You know this better than you care to admit. Adam's curse is your curse. St. Paul calls this being a slave to impurity and to lawlessness. That is, a slave to your baser lusts and desires. To do whatever you want whenever you want without a care for anyone else. This is what your flesh thinks is fun, and isn't that the fun you really want, anyway? Yet the wages of sin is death. Live as a slave to lawlessness all you want, but you will die.

You aren't the only one burdened by sin and whose bond to all creation is corrupted by sin and whose relationships to others are marred with trespassing into places not given for you to go. Even the world around you is a mockingly-hollow shell of its former self. This is why you lock yourself away in your home, annoyed if it's too hot or too cold outside, bothered by the ants and afraid of the spiders that find their way in, suspicious and afraid of whatever the neighbor across the street is doing.

Yet, in spite of this – indeed because of it – Jesus has compassion. Jesus comes into this wild and evil desolate place to restore creation. He comes to right what is wrong. He comes to make it all, even you, once again “very good.” Having compassion on the weary multitudes, Jesus comes renewing the bounty of Eden, freely granting an abundance of bread.

Note well when this happens, for there are no coincidences in the Holy Scriptures. This multitude has fasted – grown hungry, weak, and weary – but on the third day, creation is restored. They are satisfied and rejoice. They're given rest as their bellies are filled and their hearts made glad. This miracle – as do all of Jesus' miracles – points to His full restoration of creation in His Passion, death, and resurrection.

He comes in Flesh of your flesh to take up your cause, to labor and toil under your sins. He bears them in the burden of the wood of the Cross laid upon Him as His hands and feet are pierced through. He comes to sweat and to bleed for you. All your troubles and sins, all the corruption and curse of the earth, is placed upon Him. Jesus dies your death. There is nothing He does not suffer for.

And after three days, creation is restored as Life now reigns. For Jesus who was dead is alive again forevermore. Covered in His righteousness and innocence, Paradise is opened to you once more.

Jesus put His hand to the task and it was not in vain. He looks and sees saints made holy and righteous in His own Blood – multitudes upon multitudes, from every tribe, language, and race. He sees even you.

What Jesus did then in feeding the 4,000, He does for you now, today, in a far greater and more wonderful way. You've not come to be fed with that which only leaves you hungry again. You have the Word of God, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Holy Communion. What you have is eternal and cannot be taken from you. He restores you not just in an internal one-on-one relationship, but He also restores all the bonds that have been broken. He washes you not simply into Himself, but into His very body, where you live with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. You are not alone. You are never alone. You are in the midst of others who are here to help bear your burdens in love.

Bonded together by a common confession in the body of Christ, the body is fed through the Head who gives perfect knowledge and eternal life. Jesus gives you the Bread come down from Heaven, which never runs out, which feeds thousands upon thousands upon thousands as more yet remains. For as men were once undone by eating from a tree, so now Jesus gives Himself on a Tree to be the Fruit that undoes the curse, that ends captivity and prison, that restores life and immortality, that sets you free, ***“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”***³

God who breathed life into man restores in the same way, without any labor or merit on your part. Jesus fed the 4,000 in like manner, and even today He feeds out of His love and compassion. He feeds because you need it, not because you deserve it. Through His gracious and merciful gift, Jesus gives Himself, in, with, and under bread made by the sweat of men's brows, that men would be in fellowship once again with Him and His Father by the Spirit; and this simply out of His great love and compassion for you.

His Flesh gives life to the sinful world. His Flesh and Blood bestows eternal life with the Father and the resurrection of the body. What is given you to eat and drink is exactly that which was offered up in death upon the holy Cross and raised again. You who sinned by eating are now called to eat and live. You who have sinned by breaking away are invited to eat in harmony with brothers and sisters in Christ.

³ John 8:36

You who have sinned by wicked words designed to hurt others and attempt to live on your own knowledge, are bade to repent and drown those wicked words in the blood of Christ where His blood gives new life and restored words to speak instead. Those who have come from far away in your sins, Christ has died for you and desires to feed you His life giving body and blood!

One final note before we end this sermon. Note the section of the Old Testament reading that I have yet to mention. There is great care to note the living waters that surround the trees. The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil require living water. Jesus tells the woman at the well, “*Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*”⁴

This is why we gather together. Week after week God breathes into His children the breath of life through those whom He has sent. John recalls for us, “[*Jesus*] *breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.’*”⁵ We gather around and face the baptismal font at the beginning of each Divine Service as a constant reminder of this eternal life giving water. Here forgiveness is pronounced and given. His Word is sung. His Word is read and proclaimed. His life and knowledge are constantly flowing from His precious side into all the world. In this midst of this world, man is placed with great freedom and great gifts from God Himself for His life both here and in the life to come.

Thus Jesus feeds His lambs Sunday after Sunday after Sunday with His Body and Blood. He has compassion on you. The week is long, and if He sends you away hungry to your home, you will faint on the streets of daily life. Here and now – in the place of desolation, of temptation, and of death – Jesus provides for you. He feeds you to end the curse. Your cup overflows and the baskets are full of leftovers.

⁴ John 4:14

⁵ John 20:22–23

Here is bread, symbol of your toil, corruption, and death; but, our Lord Jesus Christ has taken it, given thanks, broken it, and given it to His disciple to set before you. What he sets before you is, in fact, the Bread of Life come down from Heaven. Jesus gives you a great Feast which can never be rivaled. He gives not by the sweat of your brow and toil, but by grace – for free and without effort. You are satisfied, never to hunger again. He takes your isolation and your brokenness and your death and here restores you to life with Him and with each other.

With new life, may we ever sing and pray together,
“Now from that tree of Jesus’ shame
Flows life eternal in His name;
For all who trust and will believe,
Salvation’s living fruit receive.
And of this fruit so pure and sweet
The Lord invites the world to eat,
To find within this cross of wood
The tree of life with ev’ry good.”⁶ Amen

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

⁶ The Tree of Life LSB 561:4

Prayer of the Church
Seventh Sunday after Trinity
31 July 2022

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Almighty God, You have promised to be with Your Church forever. We praise You for Your presence in this place of worship and ask Your ongoing blessing upon those who gather here. Dwell continually among us with Your holy Word and Sacraments, strengthen our fellowship in the bonds of love and peace, and increase our faithful witness to Your salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, Your infinite love restores to the right way those who err, seeks the scattered, and preserves those whom You have gathered. Of Your tender mercy pour out on Your faithful people the grace of unity that, all schisms being ended, Your flock may be gathered to the true Shepherd of Your Church and may serve You in all faithfulness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting Father, guide husbands and wives to love and forgive each other, and strengthen them in their life together. Help parents to be faithful examples for their children, and grant that orphans may know the joy of a home to call their own. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord and Giver of life, You formed us from the dust of the earth and breathed into us Your own breath of life. All people are made in Your image and have dignity and worth in Your sight. Defend Your gift of earthly life at every age, from natural conception to natural death, and grant all mankind to live in peace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Son took the disciples' bread and blessed it, multiplying it to feed thousands. Receive our offerings and bless them for the work of Your Church, multiplying them to feed countless souls with Your Word and increase Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Ken and Tina*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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 *Ken and Kevin* 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.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Marvin & Ruth, Dan & Bev, and Dennis & Bonnie* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, remember all who suffer in brokenness of sin in their bodies, hearts, minds, and spirits. Comfort those who mourn, bind the weak hearted and distressed, strengthen those who stand, and give peace to those in any need, [*especially Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, Dorothy, John, David, Merrill, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*]. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, by Your Son You fed 4,000 men, besides women and children, with seven loaves and a few small fish. Graciously abide among us also with Your blessing. Keep us from covetousness and the cares of this life, that we may seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, and in all things needful for

Genesis 2:7-17; Mark 8:1-9; 8

body and soul, receive Your constant help through the living water Himself, Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**