We are the reason for the season

Jesus is the reason for the season. You have no doubt heard that trite reminder during Christmas when everyone is focusing on presents and caroling and eggnog. People remind you Jesus is the reason for the season because they want you to know that Jesus is the reason for all the celebrating and joy; he is the reason for peace on earth he is the reason for that festive season. We celebrated Christmas months ago now. We are closer now to celebrating Easter. We look forward to Easter as a time when we once again are in the mood to celebrate and be filled with joy. We will dress in our Sunday best and worship will be a festival of praise similar to the Christmas atmosphere. We will have our Easter brunch and the children will run round outside looking for Easter eggs. Families will gather together once again knowing that Jesus is the reason for the season.

But today we find ourselves between Christmas and Easter. We find ourselves in the season of the church year known as Lent. Last Wednesday we observed Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, the Christians 40 day journey with the Lord to the cross and tomb. Lent is a season of repentance and renewal that culminates in crucified dead and buried Son of God. Lent is not a season typically known for joyous celebrations and merriment making. The season tends to have a more sober tone. You will perhaps notice the absence of the singing of the word alleluia during the season of lent. The white paraments of Christmas and Easter are replaced with purple; a color that reflects the repentance of our hearts. While we feast during Christmas and Easter many fast during the season of lent. While Christmas and Easter celebrate life, Lent observes death. At the risk of sounding trite, today we are going to be reminded that we are the reason for this season.

To understand our need for a season like Lent we go back to the beginning, back to where it all started, back to the Garden of Eden. God had given Adam and Eve everything. They were the perfect couple living in the perfect place enjoying a perfect existence. God provided for all their needs, even their need for worship. There was this tree, a tree that held out a promise for knowledge of both good and evil. The tree was to be for Adam and Eve a place of worship. God instructed them, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Gen.2:16-17) By obeying that one command of God they would be showing honor to their creator, they would be confessing a humility of self. Luther said, "So, then, this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the place where trees of this kind were planted in large number, would have been the church at which Adam, together with his descendants, would have gathered on the Sabbath day."

They would have, except for the events that are recorded in our text this morning. 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’" 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 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." How disgusting that the devil would use God’s gift of worship to tempt man and woman. He does it to us too doesn’t he? He convinces us that we have legitimate reasons to skip church. ‘You were out late last night, Sunday is the only day you have to be with family, it’s too far to drive, it’s too much of a hassle with the kids, and there are people at church that you don’t get along with’… Yes the devil still tempts us to sin when it comes to God’s gift of worship.

And what a clever temptation it was. What Satan said to Eve was true. Well almost. He was not lying when he said her eyes would be open. He was not lying when he said that like God she would know both good and evil. Those things were true. But what he failed to mention was that she who up to this point had known only good would now know evil because she would become evil. Beware, as Satan tempted Eve and as he tempts you to sin against God’s gift of worship he has a way of making his temptation sound reasonable.

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. The first sin. The first outright rebellion against God. The first damnable deed. And make no mistake this is not an Adam and Eve problem. Our second lesson for this morning told us, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12) This is your problem. This is your family history. You have inherited sin from your parents and they from theirs. This rebellion is your rebellion. This sin becomes your sin. If there were no sin there would be no need for Lent; a season that focuses on repentance and renewal. You are the reason for the season.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ Beautiful words spoken by our God fill the pages of Scripture. This has to rank among the top. ‘Where are you?’ That God would call to them and not simply destroy them for their rebellion or banish them to hell as he had done to the angels who had sinned against him, that God would temper his righteous wrath with compassionate love so that he calls to them,
it’s …beautiful. “Where are you?” He calls not because he has lost them but because they have become lost. He calls to give them a chance to confess what they have done. “where are you?”

God calls to us too. Especially during the season of Lent. “Where are you” spiritually where are you? Are you hiding from God, are you running away from guilt, are you afraid to face what you have done? “Where are you” God calls not to make you suffer. Lent is about making you feel bad. Lent is about giving you the opportunity to confess your sin. God does not come to destroy you he calls to you, “where are you?”

10 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” 11 And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” 12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Talk about sidestepping responsibility. Not only does Adam fail to man up to his sin but notice who he blames. God. At first it looks like he is blaming a woman for all his problems but look again. He is not blaming the woman he is blaming the one who put the woman in the garden. He is blaming God.

Adam is not as good at blame shifting as we are. He is a little clumsy but it is after all his first time of blaming someone else for his sins. We on the other hand have had thousands of years to perfect blame shifting. From the time we are children we blame others “he started it” as if that were to justify our actions. Like Adam and Eve we come up with reasons why we don’t worship. And the number one reason is it is someone else’s fault. As if others were to blame for your despising of the means of grace. Do you seriously think God is going to buy that excuse?

The woman made me do it. It is amazing that once again God did not obliterate that spineless sorry excuse for a man. 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” The devil made me do it. Nice, Eve. Forget about the fact that she is perfect. Never mind that she possessed the ability to please God her natural inclination was to do good. To obey the devil was to act contrary to her nature. The devil made her do it.

The devil made me do it. We use that one too. We like to act like we are victims, slaves that have no choice but to obey the devil. Never mind that the Holy Spirit has created faith in you that can please God. Oh and you will have to call God a liar when he says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” If your excuse for sinning was because the devil made you do it then God is a liar. And once again look who you are blaming for all your problems for all your sins. You are blaming God... The devil made me do it… As you consider you sins this lent is that really the excuse that you are going to give?

God does not dignify either excuse with a response, at least not verbally. But you know I think about some of the most powerful sermons that have been preached to me have been the ones my conscious has preached to myself. I can stand steadier before a man of red face and screaming voice then I can to the silent sermon of my conscious. I imagine the conscious of Adam and Eve preached a fiery sermon indeed. God has exposed their sin. They are without excuse… I wonder if they were the first to utter the words we say when we confess our sins on Wednesday night, “I have sinned in thought word and deed, by my fault by my own fault, by my own grievous fault.”

The guilty man and woman brace for sentencing. But instead they hear God say to Satan, “15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” This was music to the ears of the sinful man and sinful woman. They understood that God would send an offspring of Eve to defeat Satan. They understood that they were forgiven. But as a father I cannot imagine how those words tasted as they came from the mouth of God the Father. The Father knew as he made this promise that not only would there be the celebration of the seasons of Christmas and Easter but that there would be the season of Lent…. God knew that Jesus would be tempted in the wilderness by the same serpent that successfully caused the first perfect man and woman to sin. He knew that the devil would sink his fangs into the flesh of his son as he hung on the cross. God knew that you would be the reason for the suffering and death of his one and only Son… and yet…. and here my friends is glorious gospel... knowing everything that was going to happen to his son because of what Adam had done because of what you do... knowing everything, God said it. He made that promise. ....And He kept that promise. Jesus resisted Satan’s temptations. Reread our gospel lesson for today. Jesus crushed Satan’s head when on the cross he proclaimed it to be finished. He made and kept his promise so that you too can know that you are forgiven.

In this account we see how a loving God provides a season of lent for his fallen creation so that they see their sin confess their guilt and are able to receive the promise of salvation in their Savior. The season of Lent and repentance specifically is a gift from God to you. He could have abandoned you to your sin as he could have Adam and Eve. But in love he calls to you. He shows you your sin. He provides for you opportunity to confess those sins. He does all this so that he can proclaim the gospel to you.

You are the reason for this season. Your heavenly father gives you everything you need, even time to confess your sins. God wants you to have the joy and merriment of Christmas and Easter but to fully appreciate Christmas and Easter you need Lent. You are the reason for this season. Amen

\[\text{Genesis 3:1-15} \quad \text{Lent 1 March }13^{th} 2011 \quad \text{Pastor Harmon Lewis @ Saving Grace, Mobile, AL} \]