

**Romans 5:14-15 ...death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those whose sin was not like the transgression of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come.**

**<sup>15</sup>But the gracious gift is not like Adam's trespass.**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a messy world out there. Where do we even begin? It seems half of the headlines lately read like some kind of sick satirical joke. You read them and think, "Really? That's where we're at? This is what the world has become?" The other half of the headlines is just bad news — people dying, famous people, people the world loved. Coronavirus, which when I typed this sermon, my computer already recognizes that word— coronavirus. I don't think it would have month ago. And the Stock market plunging...

It's messy on a personal level too. You know the struggles you face, the obstacles and setbacks you and those around you love are enduring...

I hope when you heard the readings this morning you were confronted with a truth that really puts where we're at in this world — today, or any day, into a new perspective. We can't do "life" on our own. Like Adam, and because of Adam, we are sinful, susceptible to temptations, doubts, fears— all things sin. On our own we can't please God, and neither can the unbelieving world. It's no surprise that this is where we're at. When one side is fighting a war against another, the one side isn't thinking that the other side is just going to wake up one day and see things their way, that things are just going to be different. It's not going to happen. Things are not going to change. Sin is always going to be sin, and the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh are always going to be against us.

So what can we do? Well, again, the readings this morning lay out that we can't do it on our own. The second reading especially bridges that gap between the first reading and the gospel reading, between what we can't do on our own and what God has done for us in Jesus.

Paul shows us the Mighty Fortress of our God that we don't just retreat to in difficult times. It's a fortress here for us to *live* in, in the abundance of God's grace every single day.

Recall from the first reading the words, "**The day you eat of it, you will surely die.**" Those words must been echoing in Adam and Eve's ears as they cowered in fear, hiding from God moments after eating the fruit. Though they did not die physically that moment, they did die spiritually. They lost the image of God's perfect holiness. The result: They were cut

off from God then, and 930 years later Adam would be cut off from this world in death. The refrain of Adam and his descendants tolls again and again throughout Genesis chapter 5: And he died, and he died, and he died.

Because of our original sin from Adam we are born sinful and commit sins every day. Because of Adam, one day that same refrain will be spoken over us too: And he died, and she died.

But in an interesting comparison, Paul calls Adam a pattern of the one to come. For just as the result of what Adam did affected all people, so the result of what Christ did affects all people too.

First when it comes to death. We've already said, as Adam died, so all will die. **But, Paul writes, God's gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of this one man, it is even more certain that God's grace, and the gift given by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, overflowed to the many!**

Where Adam brought death to all, Jesus brings God's gift of grace to all. Through God's gracious gift of Jesus, the Word made flesh, God the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in him. He brings us back from being dead in our sins and separated from God and makes us God's children once again. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit has restored that image of God, his holiness and perfection that Adam lost in the Garden. By faith, Jesus' perfect life is counted as our own. You and I stand perfect and holy in God's sight. Where as Adam handed us over to death because of sin, the gift of God's grace to us in Jesus has delivered us from death.

Don't miss what that means. God didn't just sweep our sins under the rug. He didn't just lower the bar and say, ok, you, you and you are good enough. In Jesus, his Son, God's grace has bridged the gap between God's perfection and man's sin, between the price demanded, and the price paid.

**The judgment that followed the one trespass resulted in a verdict of condemnation.** When Adam ate the fruit, he not only put *himself* under the shadow of God's condemnation, but all of humanity. Before we were even born our fate was sin and because of our sin, our destiny was condemnation. Since the day Adam ate of it, the only sure and certain thing for us was eternal death in hell.

**But the gift is not like the effect of Adam's sin.** For **the gracious gift that followed many trespasses resulted in a verdict of justification.** Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He did that by becoming

a magnet, having every last sin stuck on him. It's true, Jesus lived his life perfectly without a single sin. And when he went to the cross he was completely innocent of any wrongdoing. But there on the cross every single sin of every human being from Adam to the end of time was leveled on his shoulders, overwhelming his soul to the point of death already the night before. Paul sums up this life-changing, earth-shattering event by calling it a gracious gift, and so we must be careful not to take it too lightly. But it fits the picture. After all, what did Adam do? He ate some fruit. Doesn't seem like a big deal, but it was. God has given us a gift. Doesn't seem like a very big deal, but it is!

On the cross Jesus suffered the verdict of our condemnation, bringing forth a new verdict declared from the empty tomb: Justification. It's a verdict that restores our relationship with God and makes it "just if I had no sin." Just if I had been born perfect, and lived perfectly. We are declared not guilty for Jesus' sake. Note that we are not declared innocent — on our own we are not innocent, but with Jesus, his life and death for us and in our place, we are not guilty. We have been rescued from condemnation.

So where does that leave us? We can't do "life" on our own. Paul writes, **"by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through the one man."** On our own death reigns. Death holds all the power. It's the one thing human nature thinks about even when it's not thinking about it. It can't ignore death. The notion is always with us, with every tick of the clock, every turn of the calendar, every birthday, every year. Death will come to us all, eventually. There's nothing we can do about it. And so there are the bumper stickers and t-shirts — whoever dies with the most toys wins. There's death's financial advice — you can't take with you. People make bucket lists because once they're dead, that's it, it's over. What a sad life for the people of this world that are slaves to that, slaves to death.

But once again, the gift is not like the effect of Adam's sin. Paul continues: **If by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through the one man, it is even more certain that those who receive the overflowing grace of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ!**

By his perfect life for our holiness, his innocent death for our sins, his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has taken the power out of death. It holds nothing over us. As Christians we need not live in fear of death — it's the doorway to life. Jesus has made sure of that by all he's done for us. In Jesus we have the forgiveness for all our sins and the perfection

that God demands — we're set for heaven. God can't deny us what he's promised. In Christ we meet all his requirements, all the boxes have already been checked.

So as we look to the future, the day we are called from this life to the next is not our concern — it's God's! Death has no power over us. Death doesn't reign in our lives. We don't dread the thought — oh yeah, I'm going to die. No, the thought brings hope and peace — oh yeah, I'm going to live!

And even if we don't get to do everything we set out to do in this life; even if we don't get to spend all our money or get full enjoyment out of everything we own, it's ok if life is cut short. Of course, it's sad. It's heartbreaking. But with Jesus we have a new perspective: It's never good bye, but only see you later. And we've got so much more to look forward to that the things in this life, and the things that happen to us in this life, one day they will be of no consequence.

With Christ we reign in our lives. Our destiny is with him in heaven, the devil, the world, our sinful flesh, sin, death, and hell, can not change that. Making Christ pretty important. Like a fortress — the mighty fortress of our God.

Live in that mighty fortress! For there he has delivered you from death, rescued you from condemnation, and released you from death's power.

Life is messy. There's no denying that. But once again we've seen, we've got nothing to fear. Here we are on the first Sunday in Lent. A time that's supposed to be solemn and tense, where we see the seriousness of sin and the consequences of what we do. But when we view those things from within the mighty fortress of our God, the peace, comfort, and security of Jesus are always in the forefront of the season, and our lives.

Where else would you rather be? Stay in it, lie down, wake up, live in it in the peace, comfort, and security found only here, in the mighty fortress of our God today, tomorrow, and forever! Amen!