

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 9, 2014**

The Garden of Promise

- 1. The Garden of Perfection**
- 2. Yet, it is the Garden of Promise**
- 3. The Story Continues**

**Hymns: 98 (vv. 1-4) – 754 –128 –
Closing: 98 (vv. 5,6)**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

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."* 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. 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?" 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." 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." ¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 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."*

Heaven on earth! It's a phrase that every one of us has heard before, perhaps a phrase that many of us have spoken before. But we know, as often as we've heard or used that phrase, it has always been inaccurate. Whatever locale we tried to describe that way, it never actually measured up to being heaven on earth, except when we open up to the beginning pages of Scripture. Paradise was really the only way to describe the Garden that is described for us in Genesis 1 and 2. In every way, that Garden of Eden truly was heaven on earth. The home that God gave to, that he created for, Adam and Eve was a place of perfect relationships. It was a place of joyful work. It was a place that God looked at and described as "very good." Adam and Eve had it all in the place – the Garden of Perfection.

Then, after a few cunning words from the Serpent, that perfection was gone in an instant. "Did God really say?" Those simple words were all that it took for heaven on earth to become an unattainable destination that we can only dream about. The perfection of this beautiful world in which man and his wife lived was destroyed. The happiness that filled their lives as they lived in paradise quickly disappeared. The love that they had for one another was immediately gone. Gone in an instant!

It was all replaced by ugliness. With open eyes, they were filled with personal shame about who they now were and the terrible thoughts that were coming from their hearts. Guilt came rushing in, and all they wanted to do was disappear. Hearts that were once filled with love for another were now flooded with hostility and distrust toward one another. That hate would soon come out as they blamed the other for this new reality that they were seeing. Things were so bad that they couldn't even stand in front of one another, stripped down to what they now were; they were embarrassed.

Of course, they could not stand in front of God. The loving Father who had created them, and provided paradise for them, and who daily came to walk with them was now an Almighty God who they feared and wanted nothing to do with. The promise from the Serpent was that they would be closer to God, that they would be more like God, but instead, their sin had created a barrier of separation between them and God that they felt immediately. And what did they gain? A new bond with Satan, who was the first to rebel against God, who was known as the Father of Lies; and a future that included hardships, hatred and death – death that meant an eternal separation from God and his perfection.

It all disappeared in an instant. The events from the Garden of Eden form a tragic story of loss, the saddest fall in the history of the world.

Here is what makes that fall difficult to listen to as you hear it today. That perfection of the Garden was supposed to be yours. That heaven on earth, that perfect paradise created in love by God, it was meant for you. The joy in work, the perfect relationships, the daily walking and talking with God, that is what Adam and Eve were supposed to give to you – The Garden of Perfection.

Instead, what do we get from that Garden? Well, look around -- personal shame from knowing the darkness of what is in here (pointing to the heart)? Yep, we have that. Relationships that are tattered and frayed by doubt and distrust and dishonesty? We know that. Hostility and blame directed at those who are closest to us in life? It often consumes us. Guilt that sends us running from God, looking to hide who we are and what we do on a daily basis? A bond with Satan that we can't seem to shake, as we listen to his temptations again and again? It's all there. Our lives are filled with all the ugliness that replaced the perfection in that Garden.

As ugly as the results that came out of that ruined Garden of Perfection are, consider how much worse it could've been. Perfection was ruined by what Adam and Eve did, but it had the potential to be much worse by what God could've done. What could God have done? Well before he asked those piercing questions to Adam and Eve, God already knew full well what had happened. He knew that Adam and Eve had betrayed their relationship with God and started a new one with Satan. He knew that the perfection that he had created was ruined. He knew that his relationship with Adam and Eve was wrecked. And God very easily, and very justly, could've simply walked away. He could have never appeared to Adam and Eve again or ever spoke another word to them. Or He could've said, "You've made your decision and picked Satan, so enjoy your new friend, and the ugly and eternal results that will come with it. You have wrecked perfection and now you will have to live in this Paradise Lost. You will have to find your own answers and solutions. And I'll be over here watching just how ugly it gets." God could've done those things, and who could blame him for never looking back as he walked away from the people who hurt him.

But verse 8 of Genesis 3 tells us that instead of this story going from bad to worse, it was injected with hope and promise. After Adam and Eve had doubted God, after they had listened to the Serpent, after they had ate the fruit, after their eyes were opened and they tried to hide from what they had done, after all of that, what did God do?

God came walking in the Garden, looking for Adam and Eve.

Don't overlook what happened there, because it is truly remarkable. In his love, in his mercy, in his grace, God came, and he looked for the sinners who were hiding from him in fear and shame. God came, and wanted to walk and talk with them in spite of who they were and what they had done. God came to sinners, instead of leaving them on their own.

God delivered a message that would change the world that had just been wrecked. It was a message of judgment. "Cursed are you!" were the damning, but expected words that came from God. However, they were not directed at Adam and Eve. For Satan there was judgment, but for Adam and Eve there was a promise.

That promise came in these words, "There will be enmity." Enmity means separation, the kind of separation that is between enemies who are nothing like one another. Enmity is what Adam and Eve were feeling right at that moment in their relationship with God. But the promise from God was that the separation that was between them wouldn't continue; that relationship would be restored. Instead, there would be enmity between Satan and mankind. God would cause separation between Adam and Eve and their new friend, the Devil. Amidst all the ugliness that had just come flooding into their lives, here was a beautiful promise to hold onto, to hope for, to pass onto their children.

Though, obtaining this separation would not be easy – God said that Satan would strike the Savior's heel, he would cause him pain - this separation would be complete – the Devil's head would be crushed, he would be destroyed.

The best part is that it would all be accomplished by God. The One who was hurt and betrayed, who had every right to walk away, who could've left mankind to their own futility, he would be the one who would do the work and carry out the plan to bring things back together. And though Adam and Eve and their children after them would carry those ugly results of the Garden with them through life, God had made a promise and God would continue coming to them with that promise, and eventually, through his Son, he would carry out that promise and crush the devil's head. It would be a long journey, but there would be victory!

That means so much for us who sit here today. As we said, as we look at our lives on this earth, we continually see the ugly results that came out of the Garden. And it would make so much sense if God just gave up on us and turned his back on us and said, "If you want to continue going your own way, go ahead, I'm done." But though we so often cause hurt and pain for God by our sins, God continues to come to us just as he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He comes from heaven and he brings a promise, "As

often as you mess up, I come to you with forgiveness. As often as you walk away, I come and find you. As often as you break our relationship, I mend it back together.”

Through the words of Scripture; through the waters of Baptism; through the body and blood given at the altar; God comes to us and he acts. God forgives our sins. He lifts us up, restores our love for him, consoles us, and rescues our lives. He reminds us of the promise.

A promise that began in this Garden, when God came to his people in love, that promise was not just for Adam and Eve, it was not just for you and me, that promise is for every sinner who sees the ugly results of the Garden in their lives. The Garden of Perfection disappeared, but it became the Garden of Promise. And now, through our Lenten journey, we marvel again as we see just how God carried out that promise. Amen.