

March 5 2017

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 32

Genesis 3:1-7

Sermon Papa Adam

In many churches, Lent begins with a sooty forehead, as believer accepts the ash of the Ash Wednesday reminder that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Last Wednesday many of you participated in a similar service over at the Lutheran Church. If you were at that service you chose whether to have the ashes placed on your forehead or upon your hand. This ashen reminder that we are dust is not meant to depress or frighten us, but simply to remind us who we are; human beings, mortals, not God.

It is also a dramatic way of taking us back to our beginnings, back to our Judeo-Christian creation story—back not only to that little pile of dust in the garden of Eden where our creation story began, but also to that Big Mistake made by the mother and father of us all before they had really gotten the hang of being human. God said, “Don’t eat the fruit”; they ate the fruit and you know the rest.

They might have been immortal. They might have stayed in the garden forever, but no. Their curiosity got the best of them God gave them a test and they flunked, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” That is the sentence God pronounced on them that day, and we have inherited it from them, along with their curiosity and a few other things.

Tradition has tended to blame Eve for the first story, as her husband did, but Paul never mentions her. The point is, God drew a line in the Garden of Eden and said, “Human beings on this side, God on this side. Tree of life on your side, tree of the knowledge of good and evil on my side. Stay on your side of the line if you know what’s good for you.”

Only that was not enough for the first human couple. God had given those brains to think with and a serpent to think things over with. They could see that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes. The serpent suggested that God had only forbidden it because God did not want them to be as smart as God was. So they decided to trust their own logic over God’s command, and the next thing you know they were looking for a new place to live.

Romans 5:12-19

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death

exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

The worst part of growing up is the painful realization that you are no better than your "old man or your "old lady"; as I have sometimes heard parents called (I might add parenthetically, that I have never referred to my parents in such a way nor do I condone this manner of speaking about one's parents. I will I think, become evident why I have chosen to use such language today as I progress through the sermon.)

Adolescence may be defined as that time of youthful ignorance in which we presume that we are morally superior to our parents. You become an adult on that day when you look in the mirror and see yourself wearing the same face of your parent that you once despised.

That, I think, is why Arthur Miller's play. Death of a Salesman is a perennial in the American theater. In many ways it is a wretched play—full of pathos and self-pity. Yet it is an icon not only for the America's love-hate relationship with capitalism, but also for what it's like to grow up in a society of salesmen, a story about a son (Biff) and a father (Willy Loman) who learn the painful unpleasant truth about another, namely that they are much alike. Step by step, Biff comes to see that his father is no hero. He is a washed up, failed salesman, full of platitudes and empty of principle, cheating on his marriage.

"You are a phony" says Biff, "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house."

And though Biff sees his father's faults better than his own, he eventually sees that he, Biff is not only a liar like his "old man," but also a thief. "I stole myself out of every good job since high school!" Biff admits, although he blames it on his 'old man" "I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anyone! "That's whose fault it is!"

It's a pain to wake up at twenty and discover that the "old man" has feet of clay, that all the pompous platitudes of honest hard work and wholesomeness that he tried to lay on you are nothing but hot air, ideas which he himself never lived. Yet

this is followed at the age of thirty by an even more painful discovery; despite our pretensions, we ourselves are no better than our “old man.”

On the first Sunday of Lent, the season of honesty, the first lesson is about “our old man,” our primal progenitor, the one at the root of our spiritual family tree. Adam. How did we get here? How did we get here?

From the dust of the ground, God forms earthlings, places man and woman in a good rich garden with only one restriction---stay away from that tree over there. But they saw that the fruit of the tree was good to eat, a delight to the eyes, and it could make one wise. They took, they ate. And that primal act of disobedience, says Genesis, is the genesis of our condition. In Adam we see some kind of link between our hunger and our rebellion. We hunger for food, for sex, for knowledge, on our terms rather than God’s terms. We see, we take, and we eat. It’s all in the family, you see, a fatal family propensity to have it our way. We look at the faded portrait of great-great- grandfather Adam and we see ourselves. We, in our disobedience, look just like our “old man.” Adam.

Adam said “Yes” to the fruit of the forbidden tree, and we have been saying “yes” ever since. Don’t call Papa Adam’s fall a matter of weakness. He didn’t disobey and say “yes” because he was too weak to say “no” He rebelled in a desire to be strong, to know for himself, stand on his own two feet, and be Creator rather than creature. “Yes, I will have knowledge. Yes, I will sustain myself rather than be sustained. Yes our lust for power, to affirm the life forces and harness them to our advantage, has brought us to the very brink of destruction. Remember the mighty atom that was to be harnessed for peace? Look at the dump we made once we got our greedy hands on Eden. Observe the war we declared on one another after God’s good gift of sex. Adam said yes, making of himself a demi-god, and got not power, life, wisdom and satisfaction, but death. The toxic waste of our lust is to be gods unto ourselves.

All he wanted was food, knowledge, security. Is that so bad? Adam said “yes” to the best things in life. Why did it lead to death? The story doesn’t tell why it just states what we know to be true, if we will be honest. We are often at our worst when we are trying to do our best. We often do ourselves and others the most damage when we think we are saying yes to what is good for us.

....Do you believe that one person can affect the destiny of all persons? Well, we speak of the “McCarthy Era,” the ‘Martin Luther King Years’. In Germany they speak of “the Hitler time”. It is as when one person stands for us all, encapsulates the consciousness of a whole race. We look at ourselves brought into focus. So Paul could say that “sin through one man.” Papa Adam.

We wish it really was true that the mess we’ve made is attributable to one person gone badly, as if Adam were the one bad apple in the barrel, Hitler the one racist German, Joe McCarthy the one vindictive American. No. We look at Father

Adam, and though his jaw is set a bit like a Cro-Magnon, the forehead a bit Neanderthal, we recognize that Yes, I'd recognize the rebellion anywhere. He's my "old man."

Prayer...

.....Gracious One, who created us, it is to you we owe everything, yet we continue to follow in the old ways of looking out for ourselves but ignoring the suffering of innocents. We are too much like Adam in that we seek to satisfy our desires even when we know that we are disobeying you. Forgive us, we ask, and grant us a full measure of your grace, we pray. Sustain our desire to obey you, o lord. Amen