

Why We Need A Savior

Preached by Ted Atkinson, minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the first Sunday in Lent, February 21, 1999.
Scripture lessons: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

This week's Newsweek magazine. Page 15. An article entitled, "My Son's Unfinished Life - And Mine." Musician Boz Scaggs writes, "On December 31, 1998, I lost my son Oscar to an accidental heroin overdose. And my world is blown to smithereens. My son - this fine, beautiful, sweet young man - my Oscar is gone from this world. Twenty-one years old. Hooked on the high, the release, that place of no worry about pressures from family or school, or jobs not yet found. And I am trying to put together the pieces of my own life and of his. There are so many unanswered questions when one so young dies suddenly. So many parts of his life were in transition and unresolved. I hardly know how to begin."

In a related story. Listening to KYW news radio last week. I hear the voice of a father speaking. His voice cracks with emotion. He says, "I lost my son two years ago. It wasn't a drug overdose. It wasn't a drunk driver. It wasn't cancer. It wasn't a drive by shooting. We had an argument. We said mean and hurtful things. We haven't spoken to one another since. Two years." An announcer breaks in. "When's the last time you talked with your son, daughter, spouse??" Silence. The announcer speaks again. "How's your relationship to God? When was the last time you spoke with God?"

Still another story. An old, old story. The dawn of human history. ⁴ A man and woman walk together in a luxurious garden. Two people made for one another. They love one another. They completely share their lives together. No hiding. No secrets. Open communication. Equality of relationship. No subordination. No domination. The way it's suppose to be. And they walk and talk with God in the garden. They have a wonderful and close relationship with God. No distant God. God is real. God is close. God is love. How long did they live this idyllic life. A year? A hundred years? A million years? Then something happened. God lost them. They lost God. ^{it was drugs.} It wasn't murder. It had nothing to do with sex. It had to do with trust. They stopped trusting God. They stopped believing God loved them and wanted the very best for them. They disobeyed God. But behind the disobedience, *before* the disobedience - they stopped trusting God's goodness. They ate the forbidden fruit. "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that there were naked." They began a cover up. Today we've become experts in cover-ups, deception, falsehood, misleading statements. All of us have. We break faith with those who trust us. We hide from friends, spouses, children. We don't want others to know *everything* there is to know about us. The cover up began at the dawn of human history.

③ Irish poet W.B. Yeats wrote,
"A sorrow beyond all telling,
Is hid in the heart of love."

A sorrow beyond all telling is hid in the heart of the story of Adam and Eve. The story of humankind. If there had been newspapers at the time I imagine they'd have quoted God speaking with an emotion filled voice, "I lost my son, Adam. I lost my daughter, Eve. My world is blown to smithereens. My son, my daughter - these fine, beautiful, sweet young couple - I've lost them and I'm trying to put together the pieces." The rest of the Bible tells the story of how God has put together the pieces.

I hear some of you thinking, "Is this a true story? Did it really happen?" I'll tell you what I've told my three sons. When they were younger Kay and I would read them Bible stories ~~at night~~ at bed time. When they were old enough to have heard other stories of human origins - like the story of human evolution - they might raise questions about the story of Adam and Eve. And this is what I told them: Yes, this story is true. There never was a truer story. But Christians understand the story of human origins in different ways. Some Christians believe that God created Adam and Eve in a moment of time about 4000 years before the birth of Jesus. Other Christians believe God used the process of evolution to create the human race. The important thing is this: If you can't believe in an historical Adam and Eve, you're not excluded from God's love, grace and mercy. Nor should we ridicule as ignorant and uneducated people who believe that God created Adam and Eve 4000 years before Christ. Christians who are equally smart, equally well educated, equally godly have understood this story differently. But we all agree that it's a true story.

The important thing is that God really did create us. We are not the result of blind, impersonal forces of matter, time, chance and fate. God made us. We are special to God. God loves us. But something happened long ago that severed our relationship to God. Now God can seem so distant and far away. We can wonder if God even knows we exist or, if God does, if God loves us. Many people find it impossible to believe in God. Our relationship to God is broken. Not only has God lost his sons and daughters. We've lost God. The source of life. The source of love. The source of beauty. We sense a deep alienation - from God, from one another, from all creation, and even from ourselves. We can go an entire day, some an entire life time without once noticing God. We can get born, grow up, get married, have children, receive honors, find meaning in our work, get sick, die and never notice God. Never seek God. This is not what God created us for. Surely God weeps for us. Surely God longs to heal our broken relationship.

| Stanley Grenz writes, "Suppose someone dear to you has wronged you. Suppose as well that after some

reflection you realize that the broken relationship will be restored only if you make the first move. Doing so, however, means that even though you are the innocent person you must take on yourself the evil of the severed relationship. You bear not only the pain of your own hurt but the enmity of the other as well. In taking the first step you assume the place of the guilty party; you carry the shame of the offending act."

In Christ, God did just that. ^{He determined that we could get back to Adam & Eve, Restore Fallen humanity.} God took the initiative to bring an end to our enmity and hostility so that fellowship may be restored.¹ In Jesus, God willingly bore the pain and the hurt caused by our failure. God does not leave us in our fallen estate. God comes to us. The world's great lover. God is the cosmic shepherd who comes to earth looking for his lost sheep. God is the woman who sweeps the house of this world clean, looking for her lost coin. God is the waiting father, waiting for his prodigal sons and daughters to come home.

This morning we hear two voices. Voices that were heard long ago in the Garden of Eden. Voices that will echo in us till the day we die. ^{Eat no forbidden fruit -- knowledge of good & evil.} One voice says, "You can't really trust God. You can't really know that God even exists." We're tempted to swallow that line of thinking. ^{Opposes the fruit of the tree of life.} But another voice speaks to us. The voice of the Beloved. God himself speaks to us in the person of the Risen Christ.¹ Christ takes bread and wine and says to us, "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you." "Take, eat and live."

Come to the table. Come! This is privilege. Come in faith. Come in repentance. Come in love. Confess sin and brokenness. Seek reconciliation with God and neighbor. Trust in Jesus for cleansing and renewal. Come even if you doubt. Come to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus.