

Midweek Advent I
December 4, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Christmas Trees – The Tree of Rebellion
Genesis 3:1-15 (EHV)

Now the serpent was more clever than any wild animal which the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden,³ but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die.’”⁴The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die.⁵In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

⁷The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists.⁸They heard the voice of the Lord God, who was walking around in the garden during the cooler part of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

⁹The Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰The man said, “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.”¹¹God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”¹²The man said, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³The Lord God said to the woman, “What have you done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴The Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all the livestock, and more than every wild animal. You shall crawl on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.¹⁵I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christmas trees are a relatively new tradition in the history of Christianity. The new Lutherans in Germany began to bring evergreen trees inside to celebrate the birth of Christ. The evergreen showed that Christ gives everlasting life. They put on red ornaments to show the blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin. They put candles (we use the much safer electric light) on the tree to show the light of Christ. A star or angel topped the tree because both announced the birth of the Savior of the world. Five hundred years later and we still love to have Christmas trees as part of our celebration of the Savior’s birth.

Since Christmas trees are not in the Scriptures, we will use these midweek services to look at three other trees in the Bible. In a way these trees can be called Christmas trees as well. For each one points us to Christ in some way. The first tree we see is the tree of rebellion and it shows us why we need the Son of God to become flesh and make his dwelling among us.

Now the serpent was more clever than any wild animal which the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden,³ but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die.’”⁴The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not

die. ⁵*In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*”

⁶*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

In Genesis 2, Moses tells us the name of this tree – The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When we read this sad story of how Adam and Eve fell into sin by eating the fruit from this tree, we might wonder why God would have put such a tree in the Garden of Eden. We might wonder why God allowed them to eat from every tree except one. While we don't know the mind of God, we can think through what it would have been like if our first parents did not eat from that tree.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil must have been a beautiful tree. Everything God made was very good. Eve saw that it was appealing to the eye. When Adam and Eve walked near that tree, they could have paused and thanked the Lord for all the other trees he gave them for food. They could have paused and said to the Lord, “We trust you. We won't eat from this tree because you said it would bring us great harm.” That tree could have been their church where they went to express their free choice to love and trust God above all things. How beautiful that tree and that place would have been if Adam and Eve continued to trust in the Lord their God.

But they rebelled. They chose to eat what God had specifically forbidden. This was not a sin of weakness for they had no sinful nature to make them spiritually weak. This was not a sin of ignorance for they had a perfect knowledge of God and there was only one command. Don't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. This was outright rebellion against God. They told God that they trusted the words of a talking serpent more than God's Word. They told God that he was not being good enough to them. After all, God only gave them everything good, but he did not allow them to be gods themselves. They told God that they wanted his place. This is rebellion and deserves the spiritual and physical and eternal death God threatened.

Many would object, “But they only took a bite of fruit. It's not that big of a deal. The punishment is far greater than the crime.” We might even agree, especially when we are the ones rebelling against the Lord our God. I know what God says about telling lies but little ones surely won't hurt anyone. I know what God says about using coarse and vulgar language but I would be seen as weak if I didn't. I know what God says about hate but nursing that grudge makes me feel righteous. I know what God says about lust but looking isn't such a big deal. I know what God says but I'm going to do what I want anyway is rebellion. We are children of Adam and Eve. We have that rebellious, sinful nature. And it shows up in the thoughts, words and actions of believers too.

Every time we choose to sin instead of obey the Lord, we are telling God that we don't trust him. We are telling him that we love the approval of the world more than we love him. We are telling him that we want to be our own god and determine what is best. The first rebellion at the tree in the middle of the garden has become world wide rebellion against the God who made everything very good. And we are part of that rebellion.

God gave Adam a chance to repent when he asked, “Where are you?” God knew where Adam was and what he had done. Adam does not repent. So God asked him directly if he had eaten from the tree. Adam blames his wife and God. “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” God gives Eve a chance to repent and she blames the serpent. Amazingly, God gives Adam and Eve good news, even before they expressed repentance. They had rebelled against the holy Lord God and he promises to rescue them and bring them back to himself. God gives this promise of rescue to the humans by speaking to the devil who is in the form of a serpent.

¹⁵I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.

The serpent's head will be crushed. One day the devil will be defeated. The devil will not get to bring the whole human race with him into rebellion against the Lord forever. There will be hostility between the devil and those who rebel with him and the rebels who are rescued by the seed of the woman. They will no longer be considered rebels. They will be brought back onto the side of God by the seed of the woman. This male offspring of the woman is of course, Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary.

This first gospel promise of rescue from the tree of rebellion would be fulfilled on another tree. We heard it in the reading from Galatians 3:13.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." (Galatians 3:13)

The serpent's bite crushed the heel of Christ as he was nailed to the tree of the cross. Christ Jesus suffered death to redeem all those under the curse of death for our rebellion against God. The devil cannot harm us. Christ has bought us back for God. The devil cannot have us. Christ has redeemed us by his own death in our place. The devil is crushed. You are forgiven.

Adam and Eve could have gathered around the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to worship God for all his goodness to them. We gather before the tree of the cross to thank the Seed of the Woman, the Son of God, for redeeming us from our own rebellious ways and making us God's own children again. And at Christmas we decorate the evergreen ornaments that tell the story of our Savior's rescue and with lights that show the darkness of sin has been overcome by the Light of the World.

Amen.