

*The tree of life with ev'ry good - In Eden's holy orchard stood,
And of its fruit so pure and sweet - God let the man and woman eat.
Yet in this garden also grew - Another tree, of which they knew;
Its lovely limbs with fruit adorned - Against whose eating God had warned.*

*The stillness of that sacred grove - Was broken, as the serpent strove
With tempting voice Eve to beguile - And Adam too by sin defile.
O day of sadness when the breath - Of fear and darkness, doubt and death,
Its awful poison first displayed - Within the world so newly made.*

So begins the hymn by Pastor Steven Starke, called “The Tree of Life,” which we have sung this morning. With the brevity and power of poetry, Starke brings to life the central conflict of Genesis chapter 3, and indeed, the central conflict at the heart of this world. God said, don't eat. The serpent said eat. The first couple listened to the serpent and ate, and the consequences were unleashed. It is a story both ancient and utterly relevant to our moment. Disobedience to our Maker leads to dissolution, despair, and death. Human beings listen to lies and choose this “awful poison” over and over again. If God had not been ready with the antidote, the story of this world would only be a tragedy.

But God **was** ready with the antidote. In the immediate wake of the decision to eat the fruit, God announces what the antidote is.

*What mercy God showed to our race, A plan of rescue by His grace:
In sending One from woman's seed, The One to fill our greatest need —
For on a tree uplifted high - His only Son for sin would die,
Would drink the cup of scorn and dread - To crush the ancient serpent's head!*

As strange as it sounds, the first gospel was a curse spoken to the serpent. We can safely assume Adam and Eve were within earshot and heard every word, but this gospel is pointed at the deceiver. To the tempter, God says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring (or seed) and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Now, understand that the word gospel at its most basic means “news.” News is being reported—news of an event that changes things. We typically think of ‘the gospel’ as “good news” in Christian circles, and rightly so. This announcement in Genesis 3: 15 is good news for us as it was for Adam and Eve, but it is bad news for the ancient serpent, Satan. It ends with his head being bruised—even crushed. God is cursing our curse, promising the death of death, delivered by the seed of the woman. That's all the detail given by God in the Garden, but we know to whom He is referring, and Steven Starke connects the dots for us in that third stanza when He identifies the One from woman's seed as Jesus.

But let's rewind the tape if we can, back to the proclamation of this first gospel. Is there anything else here that indicates good news? There most definitely is. It is good news wrapped in conflict and struggle, but it is there, and it leads to victory. Let's look.

Did you notice, in this first gospel that God speaks, the alliance into which Eve had entered with the Evil One is already broken? As far as God is concerned, she is no longer on the serpent's side. She is on the Lord's side. There is and will continue to be enmity—opposition—between her and the serpent. God still regards Eve as His. He chooses her. That's grace, hidden in plain sight. And though it is true that Eve and Adam had to leave the Garden, God their Maker did not leave them. He covered their shame through sacrifice, using animal skins to clothe them, and Eve could always remember that God still claimed her as His. Not only that, she would be a vehicle through which the Serpent Crusher would come.

*Now from that tree of Jesus' shame - Flows life eternal in His name;
For all who trust and will believe, Salvation's living fruit receive.
And of this fruit so pure and sweet - The Lord invites the world to eat,
To find within this cross of wood - The tree of life with ev'ry good.*

As strange as Genesis 3:15 may sound to modern ears, it is the first gospel. In it, God draws the lines that will eventually converge on one single person—His Son, Jesus. And the more time I've spent with this Genesis account, the more it makes the world make sense. It tells you that the fundamental temptation you face is to try to be 'like God,' indeed, to be the god of your own life, to doubt what God has said, and to construct your own reality. It also tells you that when you succumb to such temptation, God still claims you, and not only that, He has provided a way to redeem your life. We live at a time in history in which the plan He formulated has been carried out by Jesus—the bruising of the serpent's head was accomplished by our Lord's cross—therefore we have peace with God and full access to Him. At the same time, there remains enmity and opposition between the offspring of Eve and the offspring of the Deceiver, and that will continue until Jesus returns. It should not surprise us—it only confirms that what God said is true.

So repent and return to the God who refuses to reject His rebellious children. Come to His Table and eat the fruit of His Cross, the full pardon for sins that He purchased for you. Find your rest beneath the Tree of Life.

