

"One Man"

Romans 5:12-19

March 13, 2011

1st Sunday In Lent

One man. That does seem enough to accomplish very much. For something very bad to happen, it requires the contribution of many. For example, this is why so many people believe (to this day) that the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was the result of a conspiracy. People refuse to believe that just one man, especially someone like Lee Harvey Oswald, could bring down the most powerful man in the world – the president of the United States of America. More people must have been involved.

The opposite is true as well. For something very good to happen, it requires the help of many people. We are about to begin the NCAA basketball tournament. If this tournament is like previous tournaments, there will be a number of exciting games determined by a last second shot. Even though the individual who makes the shot will get credit for winning the game, the entire team has played the game to put the individual in a position to make that winning shot.

One man can't accomplish much by himself...or so it seems. When we consider what brought down the entire universe and nearly destroyed it, it was one man who who was responsible for that. In the same way, when we consider the deliverance of the universe from complete and total destruction, it was one man who did that. As we begin our Lenten journey today, let us consider one man.

When God finished creating the universe, He said it was very good. The earth was a place of beauty with pure water and air, lush foliage, and animals living together in perfect harmony. Even more important, man, whom God created in His own image, was in relationship with God and would live with Him in perfect concord for all eternity.

One man – Adam – changed all that. We read the account of that in our Old Testament lesson for today. Even though Eve committed the act, Adam, as the head of the household, was held

responsible for it. The devil tempted him to to doubt the Word of God by saying, “Did God really say....?” and Adam doubted the Word of God. He obeyed the devil’s temptations to disobey the will of God. He sinned.

But his actions had impacted more than just him and Eve. Like a deadly infection, Adam’s sin spread throughout the world as our text for today says. “Sin came into the world through one man....by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” That’s not all. The condemnation for disobedience which God had promised – “in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die” – came into effect, as well. Our text says, “death [came] through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” And, by that, it doesn’t mean that all would die because they imitated Adam’s sin (although they would), but that all were connected to Adam’s sin and therefore would die.

This one man – Adam – ruined the world by his actions. Closer to home, he has ruined your life and my life. Each of us has a connection to Adam by virtue of our physical birth. We have inherited his sin and his guilt in our very nature. From inherited sin comes forth actual sin. As Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” (Matt. 15:19)

That’s not all. We share in Adam’s death – both physical and spiritual. This death is not simply the end of life – the stopping of a beating heart or the ceasing of brain waves. Death is the opposite of life. It is not just a future reality, but a present reality that affects our existence now. “Man’s sin was that he did not want to be limited by God; he wanted to be ‘like God.’ His punishment is that he must henceforth live a life limited at every point by death. Death means that men are born into lives of desperation and die deaths of desperation.” (Franzmann, p.97) We cannot fear, love, and trust in God because we see God as the dealer of death. We cannot love and give as God intended because we are limited by death. Our greed and worrying are signs of the reign of death over us. In our desperation, we must get what we can and have while we can before death halts us.

Our pursuit of acceptance and prestige and our self-seeking ambition are all part of our desperate quest for an antidote to death. (Franzmann, p.97).

“Dead men walking” is a term applied to convicts on death row who are technically alive but essentially dead because of their conviction and impending execution. Because of Adam’s sin and our connection to it, that is who we are – dead men (and women) walking. We are physically alive, but essentially dead because we have been condemned with Adam and we will surely die. We have no hope in ourselves. We can no more rid ourselves of sin than a person with a genetically inherited condition can free himself from that condition. There is no escape from death.

Then came one man - the second Adam, Jesus Christ – who would rescue the world from death and destruction. Unlike the first Adam who lived in a paradise, this one man, the Son of God, came into a world hopelessly corrupted by sin and controlled by death. Our text says, “because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that man.” The word for “reigned” here literally means “be the king of something.” Death was king of the world.

The second Adam would act much differently as our Gospel reading for today shows. He would be confronted by Satan as the first Adam had been. Only instead of doubting God’s Word, Jesus used God’s Word as a weapon against Satan. Instead of falling prey to Satan’s temptations and disobeying God, Jesus overcame Satan’s temptations and obeyed God fully, beginning here in the desert and continuing in obedience all the way to the cross on Golgotha. Adam grasped at equality with God, disobeyed God, and attempted to be the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. As Paul would write later to the Philippians, Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Phil..2:6-8)

As the first Adam’s actions affected, not only himself, but all people, so also the actions of the second Adam did not affect only Himself but all people. Our text says, “one act of righteousness

leads to justification and life for all men.” Jesus’ entire career is summed up in that one act of righteousness. His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection from the dead have brought justification and life – that is, a declaration of not guilty to all corrupted by Adam’s sin and new life to all “dead men walking”.

Paul goes on to say “by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” People are not only forgiven of their sin by virtue of the second Adam’s work; they also have His righteousness as their own. God not only gets rid of the corruption of sin and its effect on our lives, but He replaces it with the holiness of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

Each of us has a connection to Christ by virtue of our baptism. As our physical birth ties us to Adam and everything He did, our second birth has tied us to Christ and everything He did. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1). We have been forgiven of all our sins. We have not simply been renovated and fixed up by our baptism. We are completely new and holy creatures in God’s eyes. The Scripture says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:15). We share in His life now, a life which death cannot destroy, a life which goes beyond the grave, a life that lasts eternally.

In spite of our sin and guilt, in spite of the suffering in our lives and in the world, and in spite of all the corruption which Adam’s sin has caused for each of us personally and for all of us as mankind, we have hope for the future. It is not a wishful hope for a possibility of good. We have a sure and certain hope because of all the corruption which Jesus’ work has undone. We have a hope that sin cannot prevent; a hope that Satan cannot steal; a hope that death cannot destroy. We have the hope of everlasting life in the presence of God and all of His saints in heaven.

All of this is because of Jesus. Not bad for one man. Amen.