

Second Sunday after Pentecost (June 5, 2021) Text: Genesis 3:8-15

***“In Adam’s Fall We Fell All”***

The New England Primer, published in 1690, carries the simple message: ***“In Adam’s Fall we fell all.”*** While we all have some idea of what that means, few of us, I imagine, have really thought this one out.

We do recognize sin as a part of our daily lives: We get angry, sometimes acting out from that anger; we hurt other people, sometimes with “malice aforethought,” sometimes without intending to; we get eaten up by jealousy, or its companions: envy and covetousness; we tell lies — to escape embarrassment, or to get our way, or to enhance our stature, or to win an argument; we wound others with our words, our moods, our actions; we suffer from wounds visited upon us by others’ words, moods, and actions; we long for things we know we cannot or should not have; we avoid things we know we should be doing; we have desires, thoughts, opinions, ideas that we know place us at odds with what we recognize God would have us think, feel, and believe.

This comes as no surprise to any of us. Of course, we try very hard to excuse these things in our lives: *“Everybody does it,”* is a favorite, as if that somehow made it okay; *“I didn’t really mean it,”* is another favorite, as if that lets me off the hook; *“I had no choice,”* really says that I would do it the same way all over, so I really don’t think it was so wrong; *“What’s the big deal, anyway?”* conveys the idea that my wrongs are not all that wrong and should therefore be ignored and/or excused; *“You (or he, or she, or they) made me do it,”* really seeks to let me escape any liability for my actions; and *“Get over it,”* pushes the fault onto the other person who has experienced the impact of my words and actions.

We do all this because we don’t want to have to consider ourselves to be terrible sinners. Oh, we are sinners, we’ll admit that; but on the sin scale we may score a two or three — certainly not anywhere near a nine or ten. Sure, we sin; but our sins are mostly of the socially tolerated brand, not ones that really . . . really what? Matter? Count? Have to be admitted and

confessed? Yes, we can agree, *“In Adam’s fall we fell all”* . . . we just didn’t happen to fall all that far.

When I was in college, I wrote many essays for English Classes. I was particularly proud of one paper I wrote as a Sophomore, because I would often spend a good deal of time on the title for my papers and this was (I thought) a really good one: *“Milton’s Paradise Lost and the Doctrine of Imputation.”* Imagine my dismay when the paper was handed back to me with a “D” for a grade! I was never one to accept a grade I did not think I deserved (and never in my life did I think I deserved a “D”), so I sought to find out why I got that grade and to argue for a better one. It turned out that the instructor (not a professor, but a recent graduate from college — she was probably not much more than two or three years older than I) hadn’t actually read the paper; the title had put her off.

She had never heard of “the doctrine of imputation,” and so considered my contribution to be frivolous and therefore, unworthy . . . hence the “D.” I pointed out to her that, had she actually read the paper, she would have learned about this doctrine and considered whether or not it applied to Milton’s epic poem. She did read it; I got a “B” (it should have been an “A” but I chose not to get greedy).

This doctrine asserts that the disobedience of Adam and Eve is imputed (that is, “passed along”) to every human creature that followed after them. We see it most clearly in the generation that followed Adam and Eve directly: Cain slays Abel in a fit of jealousy. The doctrine of imputation raises the question: *“If Adam and Eve were created ‘in the image of God,’ how is it that sin keeps being passed along from generation to generation?”*

How is it, in other words, that *“In Adam’s fall we fell all”*? Is sin passed along in the DNA? If so, could we isolate that genetic marker and alter it, thus eliminating sin from the gene pool? Is this “original sin” something in the blood? Is this something culturally conditioned we see develop as the child responds to that child’s environment?

This Doctrine of Imputation does not try to explain the how; it merely affirms that sin has been imputed from one generation to the next. But so what? So what if the ancient church came up with a notion called original sin, and tried to hang on Adam the mess in which we all find ourselves? What has that to do with us now? Of what importance and relevance can that be to Christians living in the twenty-first century? The answer is: *“Everything and nothing.”*

First, let me shift gears a tad. Bernard Groeschel, a Roman Catholic theologian, suggests that we use the term “original wound.” As a Formational Counselor, I like that shift, since the work I do is grounded in the unresolved wounds people carry within them. As we like to sing, *“I got wounds; you got wound; all God’s children got wounds.”*

Wounds are those unprocessed parts of us that came about either: because we didn’t get something we needed in life; or we got something we really did not need (like abuse). Why did those wound come upon us? Because the persons who inflicted or withheld had themselves experienced similar trauma (that’s what it’s called) in their lives, and often did not know any better than to do what they did. Why did that happen to them? Because somebody brought similar trauma out of their own experience of getting something they did not need or not getting what they needed.

You get the picture . . . it just keeps tracking back up generation before generation before generation. As we look at the history of the human race, it is one long story of people acting out this way. There have been people who appear to have risen above this cycle . . . but (to name just one) the family of St. Francis of Assisi tried to have him committed as insane (see today’s Gospel). Even if you cannot buy into this notion, the truth is that each of us suffers from wounds, some (maybe many) of them self-inflicted.

As to “so what?” Pay attention to the narrative in today’s First Lesson. That lesson begins in the aftermath of the Fall. I’m not at all sure why it is that those who framed the lectionary chose the selections they did (the technical term is “pericopes”), but I often wish that they had done

otherwise, and this is one of those times.

We do need to hear again and again how it is that God set up Adam and Eve to provide them everything they needed (and nothing that they didn't need!) — and still they went looking for something more. If we long for any validation that their sin is our sin, that is it! We keep looking for that which will not satisfy, turning our backs on what will fill us full. The temptation provided by the serpent in the Garden is, quite simply, “*You don't need God. You can be god for yourself,*” and all of us have, at some level, bought into that.

But now look what happens as a result. The relationship with God goes awry; the relationship between people becomes distorted; the whole created order is in confusion.

The relationship with God goes awry. “*I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*” If we had the earlier verses before us to contemplate, we would have heard that, in eating the fruit they were forbidden to eat, they had gained the awareness of their nakedness. Nakedness is just an excuse; they hid because they knew that now God was somehow to be viewed as a threat.

The relationship between people becomes distorted. Listen to Adam: “*The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.*” Again, had we the benefit of hearing what went on before, we would have heard Adam when God gave Eve to be with him: “*[At last! This] is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh . . .*”

And now I wish I had the benefit of the verses that follow today's pericope, because we would then hear how God told them that everything about their relationship has now been distorted.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, we know two things were true: 1) They were made in His image; 2) They had all their core longings met in Him. Now, God tells them, they are twisted away from Him and bent toward each other in unhealthy ways: Adam bent to the soil from which he will now need to eke out an existence (no more, “*You*

*may freely eat of every tree of the garden . . .*”); Eve bent toward her husband in a twisted desire, not in freedom. So also we are bent toward what we think will satisfy us and turn away from the one and only true source of our inmost needs.

I asked earlier: *“Of what importance and relevance can that be to Christians living in the twenty-first century?”* and I answered: *“Everything and nothing”* (I know, “Typical!”). It has everything to do with us because sin keeps getting in the way of our being the whole and complete persons God created us to be.

We, along with the rest of the human race throughout all history, are marred by our wounds, living out distorted views of self and others, striving against emotional pain at many levels, and caught up in behaviors that psychology labels “dysfunctional” and that the Bible calls “sin.” That’s us . . . and yet, that is not the real us. Oh, it is truly us; but not the real us.

Let’s try to understand that distinction. The Amalfi Coast of Italy is absolutely stunning in its beauty, don’t you agree? No, how can you? You’ve maybe only heard of the Amalfi Coast, but never visited to know its beauty. I say that it’s beautiful on the say-so of Rick Steves, who has been there often and written about it online. If we were to upload pictures of the area, we might agree that it is true that the setting is as beautiful as he described. But until we ourselves experience being on that coastline, walking its beaches, sauntering through the villages and towns, its beauty will never be real for us.

Now, I say that to say this: In Jesus Christ, what was true of you as a sinner is no longer true. Here’s what is true of you now — look at the list on the insert in your bulletin [a listing of identity statements from throughout the New Testament, it will appear at the bottom of this sermon]. That’s who you are, summed up in the one phrase: “a new creation.” The old creation became distorted, twisted, broken . . . but in Christ we have a new identity, and fresh beginning, a real change.

Now, is that true? Do you believe that everything listed on that insert is true? (Go ahead, take a few moments; this is not a quiz.) Now the big question: *“Is this real for you?”*

How would you know? Do you live your life in such a way that the truth of all those statements is manifest in how you live? For lots of us, the answer is, sadly, *“No, I do not live my life that way.”* Why not? Sometimes, it’s because we continue to buy into the notion that what defines who we really are is that word, “sinner.” Sometimes, it’s because we have never had a real encounter with Christ that has convinced us that all that could be true of us. Sometimes, it’s because we just don’t stop to think along those lines; we get caught up in being defined by other value systems (read here “Advertising”) and fail to listen to the message of God.

So listen right now: ***“for as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive.”*** [1 Corinthians 15:22] I invite you to take out that list every day this week and read it through. Then ask the Lord to help you zero in each day on one identity marker, and let the Spirit bring it alive in you. Then pray for it to become real in how you live your life that day. Yes, *“In Adam’s fall, we fell all.”* But that’s not the end of the story. Into Christ’s death, I have been joined to Him. In Christ’s resurrection I, too, rise. ***“. . . it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”***

Really!

Amen.

### **Who I Am in Christ**

I am blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)

I am chosen by my Father. (Eph. 1:4)

I am holy and without blame. (Eph. 1:4)

I am God’s Child according to the good pleasure of his will. (Eph. 1:5)

I am accepted in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:6)

I am redeemed through the blood of Jesus. (Eph. 1:7)

I am a person of wisdom and prudence. (Eph. 1:8)  
I am an heir. (Eph. 1:11)  
I have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. (Eph. 1:17)  
I am saved by your grace. (Eph. 2:5)  
I am seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:6)  
I am God's workmanship. (Eph. 2:9)  
I am near to God by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:13)  
I am a new creation. (Eph. 2:15)  
I am of God's household. (Eph. 2:19)  
I am a citizen of heaven. (Eph. 2:19)  
I am a partaker of God's promises in Christ. (2 Pet. 1:4)  
I am strengthened with might by the Spirit. (Eph. 3:16)  
I allow Christ to dwell in my heart by faith. (Eph. 3:17)  
I am rooted and grounded in love. (Eph. 3:17)  
I speak the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15)  
I am renewed in the spirit of my mind. (Eph. 4:23)  
I am a follower. (Eph. 5:1)  
I walk in love. (Eph. 5:2)  
I am light in Christ. (Eph. 5:8)  
I walk circumspectly. (Eph. 5:15)  
I am filled with the Spirit. (Eph. 5:18)  
I am more than a conqueror. (Rom. 8:37)  
I am an overcomer. (Rev. 12:11)  
I am righteousness in Christ Jesus. (1 Cor. 1:30)  
I am healed. (1 Pet. 2:24)  
I am free. (John 8:36)  
I am salt. (Matt. 5:13)  
I am consecrated. (1 Cor. 6:11 AMP)  
I am sanctified. (1. Cor. 6:11)  
I am victorious. (1 John 5:4)