

Lent 1 / February 26, 2023

Romans 5:19

***“If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”***

In our text, Paul speaks about the origin of death and its cure in Jesus Christ our Lord. There is nothing more universal than death. There is no force more powerful and pervasive than death. Death frames our existence, yet there is so much that we don’t know about death. What is death? Is death the complete loss of consciousness and the absolute dissolution of identity? Is death a transformation from a physical to a purely spiritual existence? Why do we die? Barring major trauma, what causes our bodies to wear out, break down in function and die?

In Psalm 90 Moses wrote, *“The years of our life are seventy, or by reason of strength eighty.”* More people now live longer, because of improvements to health care and advancements in pharmacology. Nevertheless, despite those advances, few reach the barrier of 120 years, which seems to be the outer limit of the human life span. On the other hand, certain life forms, such as trees and some aquatic life forms, can live for hundreds of years. Greenland Sharks can live more than 270 years. Why is the human life span so short and so much shorter than other creatures, such as Greenland Sharks?

In our text St. Paul identifies the cause of death and its origin. Paul says that death came into the world through the sin of the first people, who disobeyed God. The cause of death is sin. Death is a spiritual problem. That’s what the bible says, but the spiritual nature of death does not fall well on the ears of the world, in which we are socialized to believe there is a physical cause for everything and a scientific solution for every problem. Nevertheless, the unanimous testimony of scripture is that sin is the cause of death.

There is much that we can influence and control in the creation, but human beings do not live independent of the Creator. We are the creature. He is the Creator. We depend upon God for our existence. The ancient Greeks sensed this, two of their poets, quoted by Paul at Athens wrote: *“In Him we live and move and have our being. We are His offspring.”* God is the source of our lives, the well spring of life in all things living. Death comes through sin, which separates our spirits from the Spirit of the Creator, but the good news of the gospel is that righteousness and life come through Jesus Christ, given as a free gift to all who believe.

Death came as a result of the disobedience of the first people. They destroyed the perfect human relationship with God, by disobeying His command. Sin separated them from each other, from God and brought death to humankind. Death comes to all who sin after the pattern of the first people. Sin separates human life from the heart of the Creator, in whom alone we have our being. This separation began when the first people took the bait set out by the serpent, chose to be gods in their own right, disobeyed the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and rebelled against the true and living God, the fountain of life and source of our being. God said to Adam, *“Because you have eaten of the fruit of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you...you are dust and to dust you will return.”*

Death came into the world through the disobedience of the first Adam, but God promised a holy cure. He promised to send an offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head and take away sin, which is the power of death. Jesus is the second Adam. He came into the world to undo the effects of the disobedience of the first Adam. He did this by being perfectly obedient to His Father’s word, resisting every temptation of the devil and bearing every burden of the flesh, even death on the cross. The obedience of Christ stands in contrast to the disobedience of the first people. His obedience counters their disobedience, covers our disobedience and restores human beings to peace in relation to God. Sin and death came through the first Adam. Righteousness and life come through Jesus Christ and are given as a free gift to all who believe.

Paul writes, *“If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign through the one man Jesus Christ.”* His point is that the righteousness of Christ, expressed in His obedience even unto death on the cross, is greater and more powerful than the unrighteousness of the first human beings and all who have descended from them. All sin is an offense against God and an abomination in His sight. But when you consider the various sins and atrocities that have marred human life, the sin of the first people seems trivial in comparison. What did they do in comparison with the genocides by which millions of men, women and children have been heartlessly slaughtered throughout time and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which saw more crimes against humanity than in all the past ages of human life? All they did was to eat fruit from a tree. Fruit is supposed to be good for you!

The sin of the first people appears small in comparison with greater crimes committed in war and daily in the course of human life. All they did was eat some fruit, but it was the most grievous of sins, because it was the fountain and source by which all other sins came into the world. In appearance all they did was eat the fruit of one tree. But in reality, they disobeyed God's direct and plain command. In this they created a breach in the human relationship with the Creator, which made possible the worst atrocities. Their sin was the greatest crime against humanity, because it created sin and brought death into the world.

It is important for us to understand this, because we can only appreciate the majesty of Christ's righteousness and the immensity of His sacrifice, when we realize the awful nature of sin. We can only appreciate the greatness of His sacrifice on the cross, when we appreciate the magnitude of our sin. Death came into the world through the sin of the first Adam. Because of the sin of the first Adam, all people are born into a broken relationship with God and sin after the pattern of disobedience of the first Adam. Like a wave that gets higher and increases in force as it approaches the shore, the sin of the world expresses itself in greater atrocities and deeper depravity. But Christ's righteousness, expressed in His obedience even unto death on the cross, is greater and stronger than all the sins of Adam and his descendants. Sin and death came through the first Adam, but righteousness and life abound through the second Adam, Jesus our Saviour.

And this is the point our text makes. As terrible as sin may be, the power of God's love in forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus is greater. There is no wrong in our lives that Christ cannot make right. There is no sin in our past that Christ cannot forgive. There is no wound in our souls that Christ cannot heal. His righteousness is greater than all the unrighteousness of the world, since the time of Adam unto this day and going forward to the end of time.

We remember the sin of the first people, the sin of the world and our own sin, so that we see better and appreciate more fully the righteousness of Christ, expressed in His obedience even unto death on the cross; received in our lives through faith and experienced as the forgiveness of sin. Paul writes, "*For as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*"

God grant us His Spirit that we may see our sin, appreciate its depth and significance, and in this see better and appreciate more fully the forgiveness, healing and life, we receive through faith in Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen



