



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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First Sunday in Lent

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“The Futility of the Fig Leaf”

(Gen. 3:7)

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“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Genesis 3:6-7).

Collect of the Day

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

At my former church in St. Louis, we had a school, and a family in the school with three boys. The mom was growing tired of the mad dash to get the boys ready for school. They were not cooperative; they would drag their heels. Finally, the mom had had enough. She told the kids, “Whether you are ready or not, tomorrow we are leaving this house at 7:45.” Sure enough the next morning, three boys were marched into Grace Chapel Lutheran School in their pajamas, to the great amusement of their classmates. They went straight to the principal’s office where they explained the situation to Mr. Mueller. When he stopped laughing, he gave each a tardy and sent them back home with mom to get properly dressed.

What do you think about public shaming as a disciplinary tool? Our family loves going to Camp Arcadia on the shores of Lake Michigan. If you’re late coming in for a meal, sometimes they make you sing. Two foursomes of men fresh off the golf course singing, “I’m a little tea pot, short and stout.” The crowd demands hand movements too.

Judges are sometimes creative with their sentences. In place of prison time, one man was ordered to wear a sandwich board for a day in front of Wal-Mart. “I am a thief” it said. “I stole from this store.” Even dogs sometimes are given a sign to wear around their necks: “They were caught drinking from the toilet again.”

What do you think of public shaming as a disciplinary tool? It got me to thinking. What would happen if God punished me in such ways? How would you

and I feel if the Lord put on us sandwich boards that spelled out the worst of our sins?

I'm pretty sure we wouldn't much like it. I know this because we all go to great lengths to hide our sins, right? Bank robbers wear ski masks. Thieves work under the cover of darkness. White collar criminals hide their misdeeds in a set of doctored books. We delete e-mails and text messages, or browse the internet using the privacy setting. We lie about our misbehaviors. We bait people into making false conclusions. We distract and mislead them with red herrings. There's something about us that has always detested the feeling of guilt, so we go to great lengths to hide our sins. We can see that already in Genesis chapter 3.

The sin of Adam and Eve was they wanted to be like God. And the devil beguiled them into thinking all they had to do was eat the forbidden fruit and it will fix them right up. Quote, "When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." How could they have fallen for that? But they did. Apparently in their innocence they were naïve to the devil's cunning. They ate, and their eyes were indeed opened . . . to nakedness and shame, to sin and death. In an effort to cover it up they sew some fig leaves together.

What happens next? God tries to draw a confession out of Adam and Eve. "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Normally God's presence is quite imperceptible to us. Here it seems God is deliberately trying to make his presence known to them. It's as if God is saying, "I'm here Adam. Do you have anything you want to tell me?" No, they really don't. They "hid themselves from the presence of the LORD among the trees of the garden."

God turns up the volume . . . and the pressure. "Adam, where are you?" Now of course, God knows precisely where Adam is, but he's giving Adam an opportunity to come out of the bushes and come clean and confess his sin. Does Adam make good on it? No. He says "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." God coaxes Adam

toward a confession. “Who told you that you were naked?” Silence. And then here comes a softball right in the strike zone for Adam. “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” He whiffs. “The woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit of the tree and I did eat.” (Can you see the glance Eve just shot at Adam when he said that?) Clearly the relationship between Adam and Eve lies in ruins. And the vertical relationship with God is in tatters. But Adam, he’s not yet done. He’s on a roll. Heaping sin upon sin he says, “The woman *you* gave me. . . .” That is, “If you hadn’t made her, I wouldn’t be in this mess.” Earlier, he was so grateful for his wife, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” He was so happy, so grateful. But now it’s, “This woman you gave me . . .” Clearly, this one has a defect and it seems Adam wants God to take her back.

So Adam took a pass on each opportunity to confess. Not my fault, he says. That’s his story, and he’s going to stick to it. Seeing Adam is a lost cause, God turns his attention to Eve, giving her opportunity. “What is this that you have done?” “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” That is, I didn’t really want to eat it. It didn’t even look good and you know how I eat like a mouse. But the devil very nearly forced it into my mouth, sort of like at wedding cake at the reception. That’s her story, and she’s going to stick to it.

And you know that’s our story too. We, the children of Adam and Eve, we too want to be like God. We want God’s power and wealth. We want people to revere us as they revere God, and to love us as they love God, and fear us. We don’t want to have to do that which God doesn’t have to do. And one of the things God never has to do is confess his sin. That dirty business is for sinners, not wanna be gods. So, wanting to be like God, we will avoid confessing sin every chance we get. You and I, we come from a long line of sinners, and one attribute we share with them all is this severe aversion to owning up to our sin. Far better, we think, to sew together a few fig leaves and call it a day.

Let’s go back to those fig leaves. Maybe they gave

Adam and Eve at least the perception of privacy and secrecy. “See here I just invented the first camouflage” Adam says. “Makes us blend right in. God will never notice.”

But how well do you think those leaves worked? How long do you think they lasted? The text says they sewed them together. I picture the thread tearing right through the leafy matter. I picture them constantly falling apart. And if they’re not falling apart they’re starting to dry and shrivel. They’re itchy and ineffective. They probably caused more sin than they covered up! It was an entirely futile and pathetic attempt to deal with the problem of sin. And I think the Bible wants us to know that, because man’s fixes for his own sin have always been futile and pathetic, no more effective than a few tattered fig leaves.

Not long ago there were a number of students up at Watertown High School who got into a whole lot of trouble. One had taken an inappropriate picture with the cell phone and sent it off to a friend, who in turn sent it off to others. Word got out. The police became involved because the kids were under 18; it was considered child pornography, a very serious offense. The students thought that simply deleting the pictures from their phones would protect them. But that’s just another fig leaf. It doesn’t work. It only gives the perception of privacy and secrecy and anonymity. Police seized numerous cell phones as evidence. And when it was all said and done the District Attorney told the police they could not return the phones to the kids, because there was no way of completely erasing them. Electronic remnants are always left behind; those pictures could be recalled. So, the police literally took the phones outside and took a hammer to them.

Like Adam and Eve we kid ourselves if we think the fig leaves will suffice. It’s delusional to think we live under the protective canopy of privacy and secrecy and anonymity. Last week there was an article in the Wall Street Journal reviewing some of the secrecy apps for smart phones. Long story short: none of them can guarantee privacy or anonymity.

Not even the invisibility cloak in Harry Potter was full proof. Professor Snape couldn’t see Harry Potter, but he

could still hear Potter's nervous breathing. And though we might be able to hide our sin from others for a time, there's no hiding it from God. Psalm 139: "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to the heavens, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there . . . your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall hide me . . . ' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for the darkness is as light with you" (vv. 7-12). Neither the low tech nor high tech fig leaves will ever leave God in the dark. He knows all and sees all.

Isn't it remarkable then that knowing everything about us, God could still love us? In our text, God punishes Adam and Eve, but he does not wipe them out. Instead he takes tender care of them. Verse 21, "And the LORD God made for them garments of skins and clothed them." What a relief it must have been to rid themselves of those cursed fig leaves and to put on something so much more comfortable and practical. Remember, whatever God makes he makes very well.

I suspect whenever they looked at those garments, it reminded them of their sin and fall, but also of God's continued care for them. Perhaps it also taught them that God's solutions are so much better than any we can come up with. And that points to the ultimate solution for them and us. God promised to send an offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. This, of course is Jesus, the second Adam, who was also tempted in every way we are but never gave in. His innocence did not make him naïve to the devil's cunning. And when Jesus went to the cross and died for us, he delivered a head crushing blow to the serpent and won for us the forgiveness of sins.

In Holy Baptism, God gave you that forgiveness. There he washed you of your sin and covered you over with his innocence. There, he gave you a garment, one far more effective than any you can make for yourself. That garment was not made of leaves or leather, but of Christ's own righteousness. That is, when God looks at you, he doesn't

see your sin. He see's Christ's innocence. When he looks at you, he doesn't see a sandwich board with a litany of transgressions. He sees Christ's own blamelessness. When God forgives you, he doesn't leave behind any electronic remnants of that sin. Once it's forgiven, he will never summon it up again. "As far as the east is from the west so far as the Lord removed your transgressions from you." In fact, he destroyed those remnants with a hammer, the hammer that nailed his Son to the tree. He will not hold them against you, because he has already held his Son against them. Therefore in Isaiah, He promises, "I will remember your sins no more."

All our home grown attempts to solve the guilt of sin are as futile as the fig leaves. But the Lord has the perfect solution for us: Christ's cloak of righteousness. Thanks be to God. Amen.

