The Greatest Tragedy Ever Told: In Adam We All Died

1. A tree of worship
2. A tree of death
3. A tree of victory

The 20th century was a century of deadly tragedy. World War I brought 20 million military and civilian deaths. World War II brought 72 million, including the Nazi's systematic killing of nearly 6 million Jews as well 6 million or more Slavs and other groups. 72 million – that is more than 12 times all the people in Minnesota. And even outside of the World Wars the tragic killing went on. The Soviet's Gulag, Cambodia's killing fields, Rwanda's genocide. How many more millions died? And countless others have died in the 21st century. All these are tragedies whether it is millions killed or just one who was close to your heart.

But God's Word today recounts the greatest tragedy of all - not the death of millions but the death of billions, maybe even trillions. These are not just deaths of wars past or in distant places. Here is the record of the deaths of those closest to you. Here is the record of your death and mine. For in Adam all died.

We pray that the Holy Spirit drive deep into our hearts the true nature of this tragedy. In Adam we all died. Then from those depths, he lifts you up to Jesus. Only Jesus rescues and saves. Only Jesus.

As we begin, imagine the garden the Lord God provided for mankind. Our text says: Out of the ground the Lord God made every kind of tree grow - trees that are pleasant to look at and good for food. Even though we do not know what trees, picture your favorite fruit or nut tree. Taste the bananas and apples, the oranges and peaches, the walnuts and pecans. And what beautiful trees were there as well! Maybe towering evergreens or majestic elm or flowering crab-apple. Breath in the fragrances on the air. This was the garden of Eden - God's gift to mankind.

Let all these different kinds of trees remind you of Lord God's abundant goodness and love. Think of his kindnesses. He gave mankind life, forming the first man from the ground, breathing into him the breath of life and forming the first woman from the man's rib. He gave them companionship and marriage. He gave them this garden to care for and keep. He gave them the command to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. He gave them life and meaning and purpose.

And his goodness gave them the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But wait! Wasn't it through this tree that sin came into the world? That, however, was not the Lord's intent or purpose. Even this tree was given to mankind for their good. Let's think about that.

With the garden of Eden the Lord provided for all their physical needs. But how could they thank the Lord for his abundant goodness and love. Think of his kindnesses. He gave mankind life, forming the first man from the ground, breathing into him the breath of life and forming the first woman from the man's rib. He gave them companionship and marriage. He gave them this garden to care for and keep. He gave them the command to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. He gave them life and meaning and purpose.

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With the garden of Eden the Lord provided for all their physical needs. But how could they thank the Lord for his abundant goodness? How could they praise him for all his kindnesses? The Lord provided for this need as well. He blessed them with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the command not to eat from it. So every time they passed that tree remembering his command and did not eat from it, they were showing their thanks. They were praising the Lord their God. They were gladly, cheerfully worshiping him as they obeyed. This tree was their church. Here they worshiped the Lord their God. Here they thanked and praised him for his goodness.

You see, God gave them a free will with the power to do what was right and good. If they had used that power to obey his command, they would have been confirmed in their holiness and lived forever. So even this tree came from God's goodness. He blessed mankind by giving them the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
But this tree of worship became a tree of death. Take note of how Satan tempts the woman. He or his demons will often use the same techniques to attack you and me. We could label these techniques as doubting, deserving, desiring.

He begins: **Has God really said?** Satan wants us to question God's Word and his goodness. Is he really a good God if he does not let you eat from all of these trees? If he does not let you do whatever you want, eating whatever sinful fruit tickles your fancy?

Then he says: **You certainly will not die.** Satan contradicts God's Word. By his questions and lies, Satan aimed to plant doubt in the woman's mind, doubt about God's goodness and kindness. How often doubt attacks us!

He goes on: **In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.** You deserve to have this. God is mean and spiteful to keep it from you. You deserve it, so take it! How often the devil whispers that in our ear when we face with temptation. You deserve it, so do it.

Now how good it looks! How much she desired that fruit! It was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom. How often our desires lead us into sin, desires that promise much, much less!

Since we have talked about three types of temptation, we could add a fourth. After leading us down the roads of doubting, deserving, and desiring, he hits us with despair. Look at what you have done! You better hide now! How could the Lord God want anyone like you! What despair and terror must have filled the hearts of Adam and Eve as they were sewing together fig leaves.

At that moment they disobeyed, they died. Their bodies continued to exist, but their relationship of life with God was destroyed, annihilated. Their free will that had been able to perfectly obey God became a slave to sin, unable to do anything but sin. Their bodies began the physical process of death. And when their bodies died, they faced eternal death, the unending darkness of separation from the light of God's goodness and love in the unrelenting, fiery torture of hell.

That death is our death as well. In Adam we all died. You see, this man and woman, Adam and Eve, are the ancestors of us all. When they lost that free will to obey the Lord, it was lost for us all. Just as if someone loses the family farm, they cannot pass it on to their heirs, so also what Adam lost he cannot pass on to us. We began life without any true love or trust in God. We began life empty of all goodness. For Adam lost that all for us.

And since we all come from Adam, his guilt and the sinful desires that now corrupted him filled our hearts from the very beginning of our life. Just as if you pollute and poison the water supply of a city, all the water that flows to the homes is polluted and deadly, so also, since our human nature flows from Adam, our human nature from our first beginning is polluted with guilt and dead in sin. In Adam we all died.

Since Adam is our forefather, the representative of all humanity, his sin is counted against us all.

**But that is not fair! How can that be true?** we want to shout. But do you doubt what God's Word clearly says? Our second lesson from Romans said: **So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people...one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people.** Psalm 51 says: **Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me.** Do you doubt God's Word?

**But that is not fair! I deserve my own chance!** Ah, that is the second weapon in the devil's temptation arsenal, leading us to think we deserve something that we do not. Eve did not deserve to have that fruit. And we do not deserve anything from God except his anger and
punishment: death, damnation, and hell.

So we prove our sinfulness by the very way we argue against our inborn sinfulness, which we call original sin or inherited sin. And if you need any more proof of original sin, just go to a cemetery. Even unborn babies die, proof that from the very beginning of our lives we are guilty sinners. Adam's sin infects us all. In Adam we all died.

And that is where the text ends. That would be a fatal tragedy, if that were where God's Word ended. But as you know, the Lord God sought out Adam and Eve. He confronted them with their sin and then promised the Savior to crush Satan's head.

This takes us to another tree, not a tree that is pleasing to the eyes and good for food. This tree is ugly, stripped of its branches. This tree is bloody with a human body nailed to its cross bar. This tree is the cross. For just as Adam's guilt and sin was counted against us, so also Jesus' righteousness and holiness is counted for you. The Apostle Paul writes: For just as through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous. That one man is Jesus Christ, your God and Savior, who died to pay for all your sins and rose from the dead to bring you eternal life.

So the cross, though a tree of death to him, is a tree of life for us. It is a tree of victory. On that cross Jesus crushed Satan's head. And by rising from the dead, Jesus gives you the victory. So the cross, this tree of victory, is now also our tree of worship. That is why we gather here in church at the foot of the cross: to worship, thank, and praise our God, Jesus Christ. His goodness has provided the Eden of heaven for all who believe that his blood alone saves. He has brought you from tragedy to joy eternal. Amen.

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