

Scripture: Romans 5:12-19 (R)
Date: March 13, 2011
Service: 1 Lent
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church
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The free gift following many trespasses brings justification.

Everyone is freely given temptations from Satan, and when we accept his gifts by succumbing to temptation and sinning then we are surely dead in the spirit, overcome with guilt, and ready for eternal condemnation.

How did we as God's most prized and loved creation get ourselves into such a mess of being easy targets for the devil? We got that way because God created us with the ability to choose. The ability to choose good over evil, love over hate, reason over unreasonableness, and to choose whether to follow Satan or to follow and love the One who created us and loves us. Our fall from grace began shortly after we were created because God expects his children to obey and Satan expects God's children to disobey when Satan taunts us with temptations appearing to good to be true.

Let us hear again today's stories of our fall from grace and God's plan of reconciliation for His children so we may be happy once more knowing our sins are forgiven and put away forever.

God told Adam, "I have given you this wonderful garden to live in all you have to do is to take care of it but don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or you will die."

Now the serpent overheard God's conversation with Adam and began to think, "I bet I can get Adam to eat of that tree. I see the way he looks at Eve, she's a good-looking woman, and he will do anything to please her. I bet I can convince her to get him to take a bite."

For days, the serpent flew around watching and listening very carefully to the happy couple and when the time was right he told Eve, "You know, you won't die when you eat this fruit, the only thing that's going to happen is you will be very smart, as smart as God. You will know everything God knows."

Wanting this knowledge, Eve turned to Adam and said, "Dear, doesn't that sound wonderful. We will be as smart as God, let's taste, and see." Then Eve took a great big bite, handed the fruit to Adam, and he took a great big bite. All of a sudden they realized Satan's temptation turned into sin, they felt guilty, and immediately they realized, "We don't have any clothes on, God's going to kill us." And God put his head in his hands and thought, "I was so hoping this wouldn't happen. Now I have to figure out how I can fix this or it will be just me and the angels in heaven and Satan will have all my children in hell with Him."

Thinking long and hard God said, "OK, now they know good and evil and venture toward evil a little too easily so I'm going give Moses ten laws to see if they can follow them." Well that

worked OK for a while. Some people were getting into Heaven; however, too many were still going to hell because God's people discovered, it was hard work keeping those laws; especially when the other person's spouse looks so good, the neighbor's house looks better than mine, our parents are as stupid as they come, and God well, He's reliable and He will be there when I need him but not a moment sooner because I am having so much fun.

God looked at all He has done for humanity and saw they still did not behave so He said, "I've got it! Since one man in the beginning messed everything up so bad, I'm going to send another to set things right, my Son. He will be the one to fix this mess because not only will he be fully human and he will also be fully God. He will be guiltless and He will give in love the gift of righteousness to my children, which will give them the opportunity and the strength needed to resist the deadly gift of wickedness Satan so freely gives."

Thinking more highly of himself than he should, Satan thought, "I screwed God's first plan up, He's never going to let me back into Heaven, I bet I can tempt this Jesus, His Chosen One, the Messiah, the Christ."

Over time, Jesus' ministry grew and grew and Satan patiently watched and waited for the right time to tempt him. But doubt crept into Satan's mind when he thought, "Jesus is going to be more difficult than Adam, he doesn't have a wife." Then one day, Satan saw Jesus go into the wilderness all alone knowing the Holy Spirit sent Him there to fast and to think about the mission God sent Him to do, reconcile humanity with God one last time."

As Jesus' wilderness experience was ending and He was tired, hungry, and thirsty; Satan knew the body was weak and this was the perfect time to strike. Satan tempted him with food by telling Jesus, "You have the power to change rocks to bread." And even though he was hungry, Jesus refused. Satan tempted Jesus again by putting God and the heavenly angels to the test, and yet Jesus resisted. Frustrated, Satan showed Jesus all the countries he had corrupted and controlled and said, "Jesus, I will give you all these countries and more, if you worship me." And using all his energy, Jesus resisted temptation and said, "Away with you Satan! Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him."

At that moment, God smiled, Satan screamed and left, and the angels cared for Jesus' needs. Why did God smile? God smiled because His plan to reconcile humanity to Himself through Jesus the Christ was soon to be accomplished and then His children will be happy because their sins would be forgiven and the guilt that comes from sin would be erased.

God's plan to redeem us from sin and eternal death is a free gift; however, we have a choice to make and the choice is either to accept the gift of righteousness or to refuse it.

When it comes to giving and receiving, there's a story from the late 1800's about a businessman who decided to walk home after a hard days work through the poorest part of town. As he walked, he saw a small boy coming out of a store carefully carrying a pitcher filled with milk, when all of a sudden the boy slipped and fell. Immediately the pitcher hit the sidewalk strewing pieces of the pitcher and milk everywhere. The man rushed over to the boy and noticed that while the boy was physically unhurt, he was terrified. Tears poured out of the boys eyes and

down his face as he cried, "Mamma's gonna whip me!" Unable to console the boy, the businessman picked the boy up in his arms and carried him into a nearby store. Once inside, the businessman bought a new pitcher. Then he carried the boy back to the dairy store and instructed the store's owner to wash the pitcher and fill with milk. From there he carried the boy and the pitcher of milk to the boy's home, sat him down on the front porch steps, handed him the pitcher of milk and asked, "Will your mother whip you now?"

All of a sudden a great big smile came upon the boy's tear-stained face, "No sir, 'cause dis pitcher's betta dan de one we 'ad before."

The boy accepted the man's gift, a gift given to correct the tragedy of breaking something that wasn't his to break. Jesus through his free gift of righteousness does the same for us when it comes to our sinful and broken lives. Yes, we might appear to be whole on the outside but inside we cry and cry looking for a Savior to show us God's grace even though He is already carrying us.

Your Savior is Jesus Christ the Son God, who turned away from temptation and did not sin while he was a man on this earth so that the free gift of righteousness could undo all of the sins you have done to God and others so you can become a new person, a clean person, and you can be filled with the Holy Spirit. All you have to do is to sit down on the steps of God's front porch and accept His abundance of grace, mercy, and the free gift of new life.

God's grace and Jesus Christ's sacrificial gift makes anyone who accepts it righteous and new in the sight of God, no longer dead to sin, and alive forever.

Listen to the word of God. Repent of your sins and say as Jesus did, "Away with you Satan! Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."