Text: Genesis 3:8-15, Mark 3:20-35

**Introduction**

I want to talk about something that I don’t think the culture we live in believes in anymore. Or at least not in any way that shares continuity with what was always meant. And that is sin. And specifically a sense of personal sin. The only sin our culture will allow is group sin or systemic sin. That’s because it is much easier and useful to say to one group – you are righteous – while point at another saying – they are not. That seems to be the basis of all of our politics right now, a friend enemy distinction that absolves any personal sin in a group absolution. But I know that is not how traditional Christianity understood sin. And that’s not how God reacts to sin or how Jesus describes what he is doing.

**Text**

Let’s start with the fallout of that very first human sin. It has become popular – and I’ve done it myself – to read our Old Testament lesson with the cynics eyes as the story of passing the buck. And yes, there is some buck passing going on. Adam will point at Eve, Eve will point at the snake. But someone who is a much better person than I am took me to task this week for my easy cynicism. He encouraged me to imagine the situation prior. Adam and Eve and everything in the garden had always worked perfectly together. They had only done what was best for their neighbor. They were naked and unashamed. Yes, physically naked, but also completely righteous and living for the other. And into that perfection, that snake – Satan – comes. And forges the chains of sin.

Adam and Eve have a basic sense of what has happened. They recognize that they are naked. They attempt to cover themselves. For the first time – the other, this person who was bone of bone and flesh of flesh – was someone who might not be out for their good. They will need some covering, both for the body and for spirit. And then there is the problem of God. They try and hide. And this is what makes me question just how much Adam and Eve really understood what had happened. Hiding from God, like that is going to work. They are still trying to come to grips with what exactly has happened between them, and God shows up.

And this was my teacher’s insight here. God shows up and what does he do? He’s God; He knows what has happened. It’s always been one of my favorite parts of the Narnia series. In the Magician’s Nephew, Aslan the lion sings Narnia into being and remarks while he is still singing that it has only been seven hours and evil has entered it. While he’s making it. He knows what is and will happen. Does he stop singing? Does he just roll it up and start a new song? He’d be completely justified. That’s what Adam and Eve would expect – judgement and death. After all that is what God said would happen if they ate. “You will surely die.” But that is not what God does. He calls out to the scared bewildered hiding creatures and asks “Where are you?”

God invites the naked and afraid and sinful man into a conversation. And He engages in that conversation. And He helps them understand what has happened and what the effects will be. And yes, Adam points the finger back at God – “this woman whom You gave to be with me.” But if this woman whom I completely trusted has done this, what about you God. Are you too untrustworthy? Did you set me up? It’s a question that we all still have. It’s the question that Satan planted. Is this God trustworthy? Will he keep his promises?

God does not seem miffed or disturbed in any way about Adam’s reply. He moves on and asks Eve directly. “What is this that you have done?” And Eve points at the serpent. God, I thought that this garden was all given for our goodness and upkeep. What is this creature who has deceived me? How did it get here? But again God does not immediately respond to Eve.

But the Serpent – Satan – he immediately pronounces judgement. God jumps right on that old snake. He is cast down to the earth. “The dust you shall eat.” And the eternal warfare is started. ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman.” And the promise is given, “Her offspring will crush you.” Satan and his works and ways are judged. And those he has hurt are given a promise.

Adam and Eve are not off scot-free. But God’s words to them are not so much the words of judgement, but simply a statement of what it will be like in a sinful world. And this is a key understanding, the punishment of sin is not lightning bolts from heaven or any such divine wrath. The punishment of sin is living with its effects. The pains of life bringing forth children. The desires and inequities. The reality that all creation that used to look out for the best in the neighbor, is now out for itself. The ground takes hard work to scratch a living out of, and it easily grows weeds and thorns. And the eternal reminder that this ground you scratch a living from is what you will return to. But all of this is simply the reality of a world turned inward on itself, no longer always looking out for the best of the other. Less divine judgement and more revelation of exactly what has happened. What living will be like from now on.

And the last thing that God does for them is craft better clothes. “He made for Adam and Eve garments of skin and clothed them.” God prepared them for this new world. The serpent, the woman, the man, our own desires, the very ground, none of them shall be completely trustworthy. But God remains just and true. The friend of sinners. The lover of those who have rebelled against him.

**Christology**

Now God gave the promise. The serpent would one day have his head crushed. And if you start the next story, that man who crushes is exactly what Eve thinks she has brought forth. But of course what is brought forth is Cain. And Adam and Eve will come to know a further depth of sin. Just how strong those chains the serpent forged are. How much sadness sin can bring.

But this is the direct purpose of our Gospel text. A Man is sent. And this man is crushing Satan’s head everywhere he goes. But the scribes are having none of it. It’s another trick of Satan. “By the prince of demons he cast out demons.” But Jesus calls to them – just like he called to Adam and Eve – and attempts to talk with them. “How can Satan cast out Satan?” And Jesus reveals what he is here to do. We sinners are all in bondage in the Strong Man’s house. That’s really the punishment of sin. Satan owns us. But Christ has come to bind the strong man. Satan who once bound all the creation in the chains of sin, would himself be bound. And his house plundered.

And how would this be done? “Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of men.”

Christ would bind Satan by taking away his only weapon. His right accusations that we are sinners. That the justice of God would demand punishment. And Christ has taken that punishment. Christ has bound the strong man and we may leave his house and enter the household of God. Our sins are forgiven. And this is what God’s Holy Spirit has come to testify to. That you are God’s. That in your baptism he has claimed you. That Satan’s head has been crushed. That all your sins are forgiven. That you have an eternal dwelling with God. The promises of God have been fulfilled. He is completely trustworthy.

**Moral**

And this is where that passage of horror does enter. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Which is simply unbelief. Unbelief that Christ died for us. Unbelief that our sins are forgiven. Unbelief that Satan has been bound and in powerless. Unbelief in the demonstrated love of God for sinners on that cross.

We have been given the knowledge of good and evil. We have been given the knowledge of God and the ways of the serpent. We have been given the fulfillment of the promise and the indwelling of the Spirit. Whose house do we choose? Who is the liar? Who has proven trustworthy? Who loves us? The serpent, or our creator?

If you want the serpent, then there is no such thing as sin. Anybody, including me, preaching sin and absolution, is just trying to keep you down. That’s what that serpent said. God just wants to keep you down. “He knows that you will be like him.” And the Kingdom of Satan is all and only about power. What you can take and what you can keep. It’s always about temporary friends, and eternal enemies. That is how the fallen world works.

But the Kingdom of God is one of love. The love that gives itself not just for the neighbor but for the enemy. The love that plunders sinners. The love that absolves all sins.

**Eschatological**

So today we do still struggle with sin. We earn our keep out of the dust. But the question great question is if this is where we are heading. Do we bind ourselves in sin? Or do we accept the absolution given, and believe?

And believing live into the will of God? Who are our Mother and Brothers? Cain and Lamech and everyone who would rebind us to friend and enemy and serpent and hardship and dust? Or do we walk out of that house of dust, and do the will of the one who calls us?

The one who says to us, “here are my Mother and brothers.” Do we choose that free house, or go back to the chains?