



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **Adam's Gift or Christ's?**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Jeremiah 20:7-13
Epistle Romans 5:15b-19
Gospel Matthew 10:24-33

This is the second sermon in a three-part series. I was challenged to find a connection between Father's Day and what Paul says in the second half of Romans, chapter five. Perhaps it is to be found in how the fathers in our lives, whether biological or spiritual fathers, have helped us know and love our heavenly Father. Jesus notes how students become like their teachers. I make the simple observation that none of us have become who we are independent from what each of these fathers have given to us. Paul is quite concerned that the believers in Rome understand what their heavenly Father had given them through Jesus. The same is true for us.

Last week I spoke on placing trust in God. Paul establishes trust in God as the basis for our freedom. God has delivered us from what enslaved us and from all that separated us from him. God has acted to restore our sin-damaged relationship with himself. But it is not independence which results from what God has done; rather, we enter a new interdependence resulting in righteousness. This is pure gift. The Father acted entirely through Jesus and freely offers us all we need to live in this way.

This week we look at the second half of chapter five. As in chapter four regarding Abraham's trusting God, Paul again turns to Genesis, this time to the beginning of our human dilemma. What the Father has done in Jesus meets the deepest need of those who are trapped in the effects of Adam's rebellion. Through Jesus we come to live in the only way which can create right relationships in our families, social groups and nation.

Next week, in chapter six, we will look at Jesus' resurrected life in us. Paul leads us through the tough implications of our baptism being, in reality, the death of our sin-controlled old life. Then he shows us how to live in these still mortal bodies as though our resurrection had already happened.

We began today's reading at verse 15. Please take out your bulletin insert again, and follow along with me. For those of you who were able to read the passage each day last week, these words are becoming familiar friends: "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"

In the verses immediately before this, Paul has been speaking about Adam, the first human being. It is Adam's trespass that resulted in the deaths of all human beings since him. We see the effects of his trespass all around us, in all our human relationships, in our decaying and disaster-plagued world, and in the inexplicable horrors of evil forces. This is what Adam gained for us when he sought independence from God. You may complain it is not fair that you should have to deal with what your father acquired and passed on to you, especially a father so remote in time and culture as is Adam! But that is the way God created human existence to be. You may say it was a poorly conceived trade which Adam made. I agree with you. But it is a done-deal, water under the bridge, an evil unleashed that only God's Lake of Fire will ultimately and forever imprison, an innocence lost, which cannot be regained.

Or can it? You see this is Paul's whole point in all this comparing of Adam to Jesus; of what Adam accomplished, as it were, on our behalf, with what Jesus accomplished. Paul is telling us to lift our eyes to see a bigger reality, something so huge that it dwarfs every instance of my sinfulness, every unfair pain in this broken world, and all the malice of hell minions. Yes, what Adam wrought was huge, ugly beyond words, and has proven to be a pernicious cancer destroying good, killing what should live forever and separating those who love each other. Yet even the hugeness of what came from Adam is small compared to what Jesus has done.

Look at verse 16 and 17:

Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification [that is, restored us to right relationship with God]. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

There is an abundant provision of grace and a gift of right relationship. In this context "grace" may be defined as everything we need to live godly lives. Grace refers to the resources God places at our disposal which are more than adequate for what he is asking of us. The result is that we reign in this life. Queens and kings reign, that is, they have, at least potentially, the authority and resources to create just and joy-filled kingdoms. Everything that comes into the sphere of their sovereignty shares in the goodness of God's creative will. Adam was meant to be God's regent in God's good creation. For Paul, the image of reigning in life unites Adam's lost identity with the maturity and wholeness of us living through Jesus, what Paul calls "being in Christ".

What happens if we stop choosing to live in this inter-dependent way? What if we lose sight of Jesus in us and we in Jesus? In Scripture the consistent experience of those who have made God their master, and then don't live that way, is that God's Spirit does some powerful complaining. The believer's life becomes unbearable when she or he "does their own thing." Jeremiah, in today's reading, speaks of a time when he was so discouraged by religious people around him who were not acting

righteously, that he decided to just keep quiet. But he soon discovered (quote), "if I say, 'I will not mention [God] or speak in his name,' his word is in my heart like fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

Jesus in today's gospel reading predicts times when we may have to speak on his behalf against great opposition. It is not pleasant to think of situations where believers are brought before corrupt civil courts, sometimes having been denounced by close family members. They face trial, not because of wrong-doing, but because they have lived godly lives in plain view of those who would destroy the Christ's Church. We are not now experiencing this, but we are one with many elsewhere who are taken before judges today, or worse. What did Jesus tell his first followers? "When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say, or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father, speaking through you." And again in Matthew 10:27, "What I tell you... what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell."

I hear Jesus saying that our choice to live in right relationship with God is a serious and costly choice. The Greek translated here as "destroy" has a primary meaning of "separating things or people from each other." In John's gospel the same word is translated "to lose". When Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, promises not "to loose anyone whom the Father has given to him, but to bring all to eternal life," he is assuring us that nothing can separate us from him. The same word is also translated "perish" in the familiar verse, "God gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Clearly from these verses, the opposite of living eternally with God, in his presence, and in right relationship with him, is to perish, to be lost, to be destroyed. It is helpful to understand that the word Jesus chose cannot mean what some moderns mean by destroy, that is to cease to exist. Rather it means to exist in a place where all that is good and grace-filled is destroyed because it is separated from the One who created it. Life is more than thinking, more than breathing, more than having blood pumping through our veins. True life has an interconnectedness about it. It has a relatedness about it, along all the joy which this brings. Do not fear anything or anyone who only can cause biological life to cease! Pay close attention to the One who has authority to separate us in death from all that is worth living for, and yet we live on. We are all created to exist forever. The issue is whether we live with Jesus and his Father, or, as C. S. Lewis so clearly portrays it in the Great Divorce, exist in a self-chosen and an ever growing separation from all other beings in hell.

You see we must conclude that Adam was only thinking of himself. He was there, beside Eve, as she considered the offered benefit of knowing both good and evil. But he did not love her enough to restrain her. She was deceived; he sinned clearly knowing what God had commanded. Yet Paul's point in all this is that what God graciously offers to us in Jesus is abundant enough to overcome all that Adam's trespass has brought upon us and upon the world we were created to care for.

Lastly, Paul takes up the other option to a resurrected-life with Jesus, and that is living according to the rules. I will say only a little about this, but notice that Paul has bracketed his comparison of Adam and Christ with the question: Why did God give the Law? Verse 13: Before Moses and the Law people sinned, but it was not "accounted for" in the same way as after Moses. Nevertheless sin "reigned", even

over those who did not break a command, as did Adam. Then verse 20: After the Law was given, sin increased all the more. Really? Sounds like a legal failure. It is counter-intuitive that God would give Israel the Law so that sin might increase. Yet this was his purpose. Law shows us what a godly life and right relationships look like, but law cannot help us live that way. Human beings are slow to give up their belief that they can handle whatever is required of them. The Law helps us come to this conclusion. Through the Law, sin increases in us so that we will give up trusting our own ability to live God's kind of life. Paul is demonstrating that God's design at creation and his intention in redemptive are the same: human beings who freely choose to live in relationship with him.

So there is a right-relatedness that comes to us as pure gift. And there is a right-livingness that is formed in us by grace. Both fulfill the requirements of God's Law but are not the result of our efforts to keep that Law. What remains for Paul to show is how these two aspects of righteousness come together in us. One is given to us freely apart from anything we do; the other is habituated in us as thoughts, choices and acts which we do in partnership with God's Spirit living in us. Righteous people (in both senses of the word) are those who live as though they were already raised from death. This we will consider in full next week.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.