

alone died for my sins. He alone has the power to turn my brokenness into wholeness.

Remember that a war of Biblical magnitude is being waged by Satan for your soul and mine. I cannot speak but in the most urgent terms about this. That war began in the second chapter of Genesis, thousands of years ago. It continued when Satan had the gall to try even to tempt Jesus. It continues to this very day, as you and I each face temptations of the flesh, the heart and the soul. And although the war has been won by Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection, the skirmishes still continue against every living person, in the hopes that some will be weak and fall into the tempter's evil snares. Beloved, *do not give in!* Know when you are being tempted, and like Jesus, be strong in God's Word and resist the Devil, and he will flee.

At the end of today's service, we shall sing a hymn that has become greatly maligned in recent years. Many people think that *Onward! Christian Soldiers* is a hymn about militarism and the glorification of war. They think this is inappropriate to sing in church because *someone has told them so*. But let me suggest to you that if we don't believe Satan is at war against Jesus and all His followers, then he has us exactly where he wants us to be.

If you were baptised with the BCP rite, as I was, then the priest would have told you that you are *to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end* [BCP p538]. So *Onward! Christian Soldiers* reminds us that we are to rally around Jesus Christ, and to follow the way of the cross, if we are to triumph over the world's destroyer. What God requires of us—*that we follow Jesus Christ and resist the Devil*—is as clear as the victory He has ordained for us: eternal life in His nearer Presence.

May the season of Lent bring us special insights and the strength to achieve Christ's victory in our own lives.

Χάρις τῷ θεῷ, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος. Ἀμήν

LENT 1a

2014-03-09

PARISH OF GEORGINA—S. JAMES, SUTTON

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12–19; Matthew 4:1–11

Lent is a time for self-examination as we prepare ourselves for the glories of Easter. The main thrust of the season lies in our understanding of sin, and how this separates or impedes us from receiving the fullness of God's love.

The subject of sin is so important that the Bible deals with it as early as the second chapter of Genesis. We know the story. God created a pristine world, beautiful and complete in every way. He created the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve. Up to that point, everything was perfect. Then temptation entered the world, in the form of a serpent. The serpent tempted the woman, and the woman tempted the man and together they disobeyed the first law of God which said *"but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."*

This is the classic tale of the fall of humanity, the entrance into the world of sin, lies and guilt. Most of us are familiar with the account of Adam, Eve and the serpent. Whether we believe implicitly the details provided, or understand this writing as an allegory, the central truth is clear: there *was* a time when humanity existed in this world in perfect relationship with God, and there *came* a time when this relationship was broken.

Adam's fall from Grace is our fall. We are members of the same human family and therefore the history of the world is our history, however remote. When Adam sinned, he proved that we are all capable of sin, and the special trust we shared with God was broken.

Generations passed. God raised up holy men and women to become the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and these He blessed. But

while some turned towards Him, and walked in His ways, most did not. So God sent His Son, to be born of a woman and to walk among the fractured remains of the Paradise He had created.

Before beginning His earthly ministry, Jesus needed to prepare Himself, and to do so, He spent forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, fasting. At some point during this period of self-examination, the Devil came to Jesus. He pulled out all the stops, tempting our Lord in every way possible: with physical gratification, with divine power and with earthly sovereignty. Each time Jesus refused to be taken in, relying on the power of God's Word in the Scriptures to rebuke Satan. When at last the Devil left, defeated, we are told the angels of Heaven came and ministered to our Lord.

One of the problems of reading the Scriptures as we have just done is that the words fail to convey the depth of struggle that must have gone on. We don't know whether Adam and Eve tried to resist the serpent at all. We *do* know that Jesus succeeded in routing the Devil by quoting from Deuteronomy 8. But the Scripture is silent about the intensity of the struggle against temptation. And that's where the agency of the Holy Spirit comes in, helping us to understand something of the enormity of the battle between God and the forces of evil.

To understand the effect of temptation, we need to understand the nature of sin. *Sin* is a word that the world hates, isn't it? And it hates the word because sin suggests judgement. In our spiritual evolution during the past two thousand years, the world has grown to hate the thought of being judged. We prefer to think in more egalitarian terms, especially here in the New World... You know—I am equal to you, and you are equal to anyone else. Nobody is our better...

Except One: The Lord Jesus Christ, Who proved that perfect

humanity is *humanity without sin*. He proved it by refusing to yield to the enormously powerful temptations that Satan placed before Him. And because of this, Jesus is the antidote for my sin, for your sin, for the world's sin—past, present or future. The Bible tells us *“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”* [Acts 4:12]

We have the remedy for sin in Jesus—praise God! But we must always remember that sin is *serious*. There is no such thing as a little sin, because all sin separates us from God.

*Many years ago there lived a Methodist preacher who often spoke on the subject of sin. He minced no words, but defined sin as “that abominable thing that God hates.” A leader in his congregation came to him on one occasion and urged him to cease using the ugly word. Said he: “Dr. So-and-So, we'd prefer it if you would not speak so plainly about sin. Our young people, hearing you, will be more likely to indulge in sin. Call it something else, as “inhibition,” or “error” or a “mistake,” or even “a twist in our nature”.”*

*“I understand what you mean,” the preacher remarked and going to his desk brought out a little bottle. “This bottle,” he said, “contains strychnine. You will see that the red label here reads “Poison.” Would you suggest that I change the label, and paste one on that says, “Wintergreen?” The more harmless the name the more dangerous the dose will be.”*

Beloved, sin is *sin*. It is abominable, and God hates it. No amount of sugar-coating will change that, anymore than pasting a label marked “Wintergreen” onto a bottle of strychnine will make the contents any less lethal. Calling sin by any other name is an exercise that can only lead to progressive spiritual blindness. My defects of character are nothing less than the result of my sinful, broken, fallen nature. If I am less than what the Lord intends, it is because I am a sinner still in need of the redemptive power of the blood of Jesus Christ. He