

Lent: Week 1

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[0:00] Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, and with your hearts and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. And he relents over disaster. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Little Jack Horner sat in the corner, eating a Christmas pie. He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, what a good boy am I.

The root of that fairy tale, the root of this poem actually has its roots in Anglicanism. Believe it or not, Henry VIII went to shut down some Roman Catholic monasteries.

And the abbot of one actually had like these investment bundles you have these days. He had, you know, nine or ten of them. So he decided that he would bundle together some of the deeds of the lesser properties and send them to Henry VIII in hopes that he could maybe bribe him to let him keep the main one going.

[1:40] And the messenger he sent was a man named Thomas Horner. They called Keens back then Jack. So Keens would be Jack. So little Jack Horner. And little Jack Horner, as he was taking the package of concealed deeds, realized what he had, and realized that all of a sudden Jack Horner had a collection of monasteries that he could keep for himself.

But that's not the version of the story I was raised in. The version of the story I was raised with always had a little toe-headed boy in a white as this surplice shirt sitting in the corner of a room with just jam all over his, his, his, and a smile on his face.

What? Me? Anybody that's had kids has had a similar experience at some point in their past. A friend of mine was telling me recently that he was raised as a pastor's kid and lived next door to the church.

And that church had a pie sale to raise funds for a ministry. And there were 50 pies in that church. And one day he snuck over there while his parents weren't paying attention, came into the church, and took a fork, and took one bite out of 50 pies.

His father, on a pastor's salary, then had to purchase 50 pies. But I have a similar story for my youth.

[3:21] My mother, at one point, we didn't have a lot of money growing up, but they redid a room. And about three days after my mother had wallpapered the room, I, as a four-year-old, took a meat tenderizer.

You know what these are? The mallets with the spikes on the end? Just kind of went along the wall. And left my mark. And it's one of my earliest memories, because I can remember getting caught. And when I was discovered, you know what I told my mother? Some naughty little boy did this. No. No. That's not a model of repentance. I'd like you to note that that came out of me without being trained.

It was my response as a four-year-old. Nobody had to show me how to do that response. The tendencies of naughty boys and girls to glare at themselves oh-so-good seems to be a tale as old as time itself.

[4:42] We see it in the very next verse after the Genesis passage that Raymond read. As the Lord God walks about the garden, Adam and Eve try to conceal themselves in their fallen condition, covering themselves in the faulty clothes of leaves, as though that they can get away with it.

At the end of the sixth day, God had made man. And he looked upon man who he had created in his own image and pronounced him very good.

But that created state of goodness did not last long. The first couple chose not to believe the warning of their creator and instead participated in the deception of the serpent.

They were created to work in the garden, under the authority of God and in close fellowship with God, and they were not satisfied with what they had been given. For when the serpent came and compelled them that the eating of the tree in the midst of the garden would make them like God, they decided that maybe what God gave them was good, but what the serpent offered them was better.

And behind that all was a picture that Adam and Eve thought that they could do a work that would make themselves more. that they could improve on what God had wrought.

[6:18] And that choice to turn from God, eat the fruit of the tree, broke them. It shattered them on every level of their being, every part of their heart, every part of their soul, every part of their mind.

They had broken the law. They had transgressed. Isn't that what Calb tells us every week as we gather here to worship right at the beginning as he summarizes the law?

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Even before the age of the law and the prophets, in the garden of Eden, the first and great commandment stood.

You shall love the Lord your God with every part of who you are. And by eating of the fruit, they turned their back on God, seeking instead to love their own selves with all their heart, soul, and mind.

[7:31] They put themselves before God because that was what Eve considered as she listened to that serpent's lie. And their brokenness filled them.

It ended them. It poured out from them and spilled into the world, contaminating everything that they touched. For when those image bearers turned from the one who had created them good, they took the good world they were placed in and perverted it.

And so we read in Genesis 3, 17, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. And as we read in Romans, from that point, death reigned from Adam on. And elsewhere in Romans, in Romans chapter 8, Paul writes that all creation was subjected to futility and groans and pain because of the corruption that pollutes it.

And so as we are at the first Sunday of Lent, at the beginning of this season of repentance, the world looks at us and asks us, why do we even bother with this charade?

[8:53] Because we live in a world that tells us we are inherently good. That there is a light in all of us, that we can do better, be better, because there is nothing really wrong with us.

If you desire to practice, commit yourself to a life of sexual immorality, we are told it is not because our first parents fell, it's actually God's fault. God's enemies claim that He made us this way, that we are just acting naturally.

If God gave us these desires, and He named it good, why should I deny myself? Brothers and sisters, this is simply Jack Horner with plum juice, all over his white frock, talking about how perfectly fine he is.

And when people tell me this, I say, of course we are acting naturally, but we are not acting the way we were created to be. We are acting according to our nature of sin.

For we affirm that sin came into the world through one man, and then death through sin, and then death came to all man because all sin.

[10:03] And this denial by the world of the need for repentance leads to a really terrifying and scary place apart from Christ, because it cuts off the only avenue to forgiveness.

We see this playing out today in something that's called cancel culture. Is that term familiar to everybody? It's sort of been the phrase of this year for, I think, millennials down.

But it's this idea that when someone does something so bad you can't ignore, something where you can no longer pretend that sinful desires are good, you cancel them.

You try to forget they ever existed. If a movie star is involved in a particularly pernicious scandal, you no longer rent their movies, you never watch it, you try to pretend that they never existed.

See, the one that's canceled must be placed outside the camp because his presence points to the failure of a life without repentance, of a whole system of trying to name our every whim and fancy

as good.

[11:15] The world has no place of forgiveness for the transgressor. Why is repentance withheld? Because there's only one way to find forgiveness. Jesus. Because repentance points to grace and mercy, and grace and mercy can only be found at the feet of a gracious and merciful Savior. Because repentance says, I know there is no good in me, I need another. And that's why we come to this season of Lent.

Now, not to repeat an Ash Wednesday service, but we have this idea of ashes as we kick off our Lenten fast. We have these things called sacraments.

Most of you are familiar with them, but they're the means of grace, baptism and Holy Communion. They're what we call effectual signs. They actually give us those things which they also signify.

[12:23] They're God reaching out to you and changing you. But it's not so with the Ash we use to mark the beginning of Lent.

That is not a sacrament. We don't require it. If you withhold yourself from the table or refuse to be baptized, you'll probably have a member of the church come and talk to you and disciple you, but if you don't want to get ashes, nobody's going to come knocking at your door to see why.

Why is that? What's the policy there? Well, it's because we need the change affected by the table and the waters of baptism. We don't need the Ash. The Ash just marks what we already are.

Miserable offenders. When Father Caleb marked your forehead this past Wednesday with the cross of Ash, he was simply naming you a son of Adam and a daughter of Eve.

You will die in your trespasses and sin, whether ashes are imposed or not. The ashes are a simple sign that points out not only are we out of the game and not competing, but that we lost the match before it even began.

[13:37] You will only live if you come to Jesus. Brothers and sisters, this is repentance.

It is turning from Adam and Eve to Jesus, our only hope in life and death. There's another subtle danger to the Lenten fast because there's another school of thought that teaches this season as a time to somehow make ourselves better.

Eve had that same thought as she took that bite from the apple. The statue is no different than what she did when she ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eve thought she was simply improving her estate.

Now, 2020 has been a weird year. For some reason, Lent got popular this year. I don't know why. I have not seen this before, but on Wednesday night, I was watching the CNN town hall, I think, with the Democratic town halls for different candidates.

I'm not getting political. It was just that my DVR kicked me over there after the show I had watched, and I was too lazy to get up and get a remote. But I saw the weirdest thing.

[15:02] It's the first time I've ever seen it. Political candidate after political candidate and anchorman with the ashes on their forehead. I've never seen this before. I think it's the hot thing for 2020, which is scary.

Mark Wahlberg this week said, people always ask me, what are you going to give up for Lent? I think more importantly, let's try to do more.

More love, more peace, more acceptance, more caring, and more kindness. That sounds good, but it's ridiculous.

Can you do more? You can do more than what God has done for you?

What would Mark Wahlberg's statements mean to Paul? Paul who wrote in Romans chapter 7, for I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

[16:17] Lent is not a time of self-help, not a time to renovate your life. You're not a fixer-upper, and you cannot pull yourself up by your boot strings. This is why we find in the psalm that was given today's reading a perfect understanding of what it means to come in repentance.

Psalm 51 should be our song this Lenten season. In fact, I suspect it will be literally our song later on in this service, if I remember correctly. from hearing the rehearsal.

David understands that he is a helpless sinner. He writes in verse 3, For I know my transgressions, my wickedness, and my sin is ever, always, before me.

Against you, God, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. And David understands that he was lost before he even got started.

Because he writes, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Before I was even born, I had lost the fight.

[17 : 43] And David understands that the only hope he has is to turn to a merciful God who looks on his hopeless condition, not to accept him as he is, but to change him.

Not because he earned it, not because he deserves it, but because God loves him. The love of God is what fuels true repentance.

And that is what repentance is. Repentance is running into the arms of a compassionate and loving Father.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

[18 : 56] Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. I'm going to stand here, because our faith of the birds in the Nicene Creek.

We believe in one God, and the Father, and the Holy Spirit.