

Lent I

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] That's the grave. Hear now a reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

But now Christ has risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Perhaps it seems a bit odd to begin a sermon for the first Sunday in Lent with reference to Easter.

But in some ways, that is exactly what this morning's gospel is really all about. For since by man came death, explained Saint Paul, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.

[1 : 01] For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But first, let us recall Genesis chapter 2.

Let us recall the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth, and before any herb of the field had grown.

For the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.

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 surely die. In other words, the Lord God placed a man, Adam, in a lush and fruitful paradise filled with all sorts of delectable delights, of which he could freely eat, except for only one.

And in the beginning, life was good. Life was sweet. That is, until the man fell prey to the devil's temptations, and ate the fruit of that one tree of which he was told not to eat.

[2 : 29] But let's just stop here and take that story, the account of mankind's fall from grace, and compare it with the account in this morning's gospel.

For in this morning's gospel, the Lord God again takes a man, Jesus Christ. But this time he does not place him in a lush and fruitful paradise.

Our world before the fall, but instead places him in a barren and desolate wilderness. Our world after the fall.

Where for 40 days and 40 nights he would fast, until, like Adam before him, he also was tempted by the devil.

Only this time, the new man, Jesus Christ, would not fall prey to the devil's temptations, but would, in fact, defeat the devil, and would continue to defeat the devil, until at last that ancient serpent's head was crushed beneath his feet, beneath the tree of life everlasting.

[3 : 47] For since by man came death, explained St. Paul, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

And here's really the point I'd like to make this morning. Even though Lent is a time when we should all weep and mourn and lament for our many sins, and remember all that Christ Jesus has suffered for us on the cross, Lent is also not a time when we should all walk around with a sad countenance on our face and act as if Easter never happened.

For Christ is risen. And the simple fact is that Easter has already happened and will happen again on the last day, when the dead in Christ will rise, just as Jesus rose over 2,000 years ago.

And Easter is also happening now, today. It is happening every time we say no to sin and yes to God.

Easter is happening when we rise from the ashes of Adam's disobedience into the life of Christ Jesus' perfect obedience to God.

[5 : 16] For Lent is the season when we are taught how to die to self in order to live for God. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man are many made righteous, who live and who abide in union and communion with that one man, Jesus Christ.

And that is why in preparation for Easter, the first Sunday in Lent always begins with that great reversal of what occurred during the fall.

For in the beginning God placed the man Adam in a lush paradise, only sadly to watch that man fall prey to the devil's temptations. Yet in his abundant mercy, God placed a new man, Jesus Christ, into a barren wilderness in order to have the devil's temptations be overcome by the righteousness of he who is both true God and true man.

For in the season of Lent, we are all called to deny ourselves so that what was lost by Adam's disobedience might continue to be ours by Christ Jesus' perfect obedience.

Christ Jesus, a righteous man who is not only for us, but who by virtue of God's sacramental grace now lives in us as well.

[6 : 57] Which is why our Lord's 40 days and 40 nights of fasting and self-denial have now become our 40 days and 40 nights of fasting and self-denial also.

For in Christ Jesus, we are called daily to die to sin and selfishness in order that we might rise, rise and live for God and for our neighbor.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.