

“Whom do you believe?”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Old Testament lesson. **“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”** Here ends our text.

Whom do you believe? Whenever you read a news article, you’ll find that a good journalist will often present two very opposing points of view. One person states what seems to be a valid argument. A second person replies with an equally valid, but totally contradictory, response. They can’t both be right. Who is telling the truth? Whom do you believe? You don’t always know. But, if you do know one of the persons in the article, if that person has helped you, dealt honestly with you, and befriended you, you tend to believe that person. Your decision is based not so much on the words each person is saying but on who is saying the words.

Adam and Eve were faced with a similar problem. God said, **“If you eat from this tree, you will surely die.”** Satan said, **“You will not surely die. You will be like God.”** Two completely contradictory statements. Which person was right? Who was telling the truth? Whom should they believe? But in this case Adam and Eve knew God. God was their friend. They should have believed God.

You see God was the one who gave them life. Unlike all the other creatures, God created man specially. He carefully formed Adam from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and Adam became a living soul. In a similar way God created Eve. After He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, God took one of Adam’s ribs and formed the woman, Eve.

But besides life, besides the fact that they breathed, that blood pumped through their veins, God also gave Adam and Eve all the blessings of life. He placed them in a beautiful, lush garden. And in this garden were the most pleasing trees with the sweetest fruit. God wanted them to enjoy His blessings of life.

Finally, God gave Adam and Eve eternal life. Besides the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden, there was also the tree of life. Adam and Eve could reach out their hand, take, and eat from this tree and live forever. It was just an ordinary tree. But when God attached His word of promise, it became a special tree which bestowed a blessing. Believing God’s word, they could continually eat from the tree of life and so live forever. It was always God’s intention that man live eternally with Him.

God was a father to Adam and Eve. Like any parent, who gives his child life, who feeds and care for his child, who never wants any harm to come to his child, so God wanted only the best life for Adam and Eve. They should have believed God.

But instead, they listened to Satan. Adam and Eve knew the word of God. Eve was quick to say, “God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden.’” But God’s words, “You shall surely die,” are kind of a downer. Who wants to listen to that? How much better sounding were the words of Satan, “You will be like God.” Adam and Eve forgot who was saying the words and focused on the niceties of the words themselves. And this is where Satan excels. As the father of lies, he dresses up his words to look so good. Like a fisherman who disguises his deadly hook in his lure, so Satan dresses up his deadly lies with his pleasant-sounding words. But Satan’s words, no matter how good they sound, are still lies.

And so Adam and Eve doubted God’s word and ate from the forbidden tree. It was just an ordinary tree. But this time, when God attached His word of promise, it became a special tree which bestowed, not a blessing, but a curse. In disbelief of God’s word, they ate from this tree and brought, not life, but death upon themselves. God’s words, however negative they may sound, are still the truth. They should have believed God.

And so they blew it. They blew it for all of us. **“Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”** Because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, they brought death not only upon themselves, but upon all of us as well.

But we can’t blame all our troubles on Adam and Eve. We, too, know God’s word. We know His commandments. But we don’t always like to hear God’s words. Who wants to hear that we are sinners, that we are going to die, that we deserve God’s punishment? That’s just too depressing. Instead tell us how good we are. Tell us how our good deeds deserve God’s blessing. Tell us how we can save ourselves . . . and be like God. Tell us more about that. And that is exactly what Satan does. He tells us more lies, and we bite on them. Satan doesn’t do this because he loves us, cares for us, and wants to give us life. Just like Adam and Eve, he

tempts us because he wants us dead. The fisherman doesn't care about the well being of the fish. He wants that fish caught, skinned, gutted, and frying. And that is how Satan wants you. He wants you dead. And that is what we deserve.

But it is still God's desire that you live forever with Him. Yes, **through the one man, Adam, the many were made sinners, but also through the obedience of the one man, Jesus Christ, the many will be made righteous.** Even though man sinned, even though you sinned, God did not change. God never changed his intention for you to live eternally with Him. God only changed how He would do it. He would do it, not through the tree of life, but through His own Son Jesus Christ. As God and man, Jesus Christ performed the act of obedience that Adam couldn't do. **He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.**

Just like he tempted Adam, Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. And his words sounded so good. "Hungry? If you really are the Son of God turn those stones into bread." Satan even used the word of God. "It is written. He will command His angels concerning you." Finally Satan said, "I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world." Those words sure sounded good. The only thing God the Father could say to His Son was, "It's that way to Jerusalem. That way to the cross." But Jesus paid no attention to whose words sounded better. He believed His Father and chose the way of the cross.

When Jesus hung on that cross, in agony, Satan tempted Him again. Those who passed by insulted Him. "If you are the Son of God, save yourself." The chief priests mocked him. "Come down now from the cross, and we will believe in you." One of the criminals even pleaded, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" It would have been so much easier. Christ the Son of God could have indeed saved Himself. He could have come down from that cross. But the chief priests would still not have believed in Him. And He would have saved no one. He wouldn't have saved us. The devil would have won.

But unlike Adam, Jesus didn't listen to Satan. He believed His Father. And for that one act of righteousness, that brought life for all men, He died.

Now whom do you believe?

God has given you life. You are still His special creation. He chose you before the creation of the world. He knew you even before He formed you in the womb. The breath of the Almighty gives you life.

God has given you the blessings of life. He richly and daily provides you with all that you need to support this body and life. It is God's desire that you enjoy the life He has given you and all His blessings.

God has given you eternal life. Before Adam and Eve's fall into sin, God gave them eternal life through His word of promise attached to the tree of life. But now God gives you eternal life through other means.

God gives you eternal life through His written word, the Holy Scriptures. In His word God promises you eternal life. When someone promises to do something of extreme importance, he is often asked to put it in writing. It might be a contract or maybe a will. Friends may advise you, "Make sure you get it in writing." When a promise is in writing, it does two things. First it binds the person to fulfill his promise. Second, it gives assurance to the person receiving the promise that he will indeed receive it. This is what God does for you. He gives you His promise in writing. He binds Himself to fulfill His promise and assures you of eternal life. We have no book of promises from Satan because liars never put their word in writing. But whom do you believe?

God gives you eternal life through His sacramental word. Just as God joined His word of promise to an ordinary tree, so He now joins His word of promise to ordinary water and ordinary bread and wine. Adam and Eve could reach out their hand, take, and eat from the tree of life and live forever. Jesus Christ says to you, "Take, eat, this is my body, given for you, for the forgiveness of your sins." The world tells us to doubt that this can be so. Whom do you believe?

God gives you eternal life through His living Word, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, who dwelt among us. In place of the tree of life, God has given you His Son. Instead of the fruit of that tree, Christ gives you His body and blood, which He shed on the tree of the cross. The devil wants you dead. Jesus Christ died that you might live forever.

It has always been God's desire, from the very beginning, that you live eternally with Him. Whom do you believe? Believe in the one who gives you life, the one who gives you the blessings of life, the one who died that you might live forever. Believe in our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.