

## Sermon: Retelling the Story of Adam Through Jesus

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, February 22, 2026)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we are in the season of Lent, a forty-day journey to the Holy Week, then to the passion and crucifixion of Christ, and towards his resurrection on the glorious Easter Sunday. The season of Lent is a time of reflection, penance and spiritual renewal, characterized by fasting, prayer and almsgiving, or generosity to others, particularly those less fortunate than us.

We begin this season with the passage of Genesis chapter 2-3, looking theologically at the theme of temptation, fall, sin and death. It is a story that speaks of human brokenness that pastor like myself may deal with professionally, but touches on all of us personally.

The story begins with a statement of human vocation and its limit. The first human, Adam, deriving from the Hebrew word *adama*, or more commonly understood as ‘mud’. A helper, Eve, is added to help Adam, and together they are entrusted and placed in a garden of God’s creation “to tend and keep it”.

The Creator gives life to the first human, then gives meaning and purpose to this life. We are made to serve as caretakers of God’s creation, as stewards of a wonderfully made garden which God sees as good, a world that we did not make and can only receive as a gracious gift.

In discharging our vocation as caretakers, God gives us remarkable freedom, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat”. Think of this for a bit...every tree in the garden is our to eat, to provide sustenance, to enjoy, for our delight.

Every tree except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—which we shall not eat. The freedom God grants us is not boundless, as remarkable as it is. There are limits to our freedom, “for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.”

What is this tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What precisely does the tree signifies? We do not know for certain, for it is not mentioned elsewhere in the Scripture, nor in other ancient literatures. What it does signifies is the connection between obedience to God and human

flourishing. When we obey God, humanity flourishes; when we disobey, such flourishing is compromised, broken.

With such a limitation to an expansive and remarkable freedom, came the crafty serpent to the woman, “*Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?*” (Genesis 3:1) Yes, technically that is accurate, but the way it is phrased is intended to make God and God’s command seem arbitrary and unreasonable. It plants a seed of doubt in the mind of the woman, who is, as you may note, not the original recipient of God’s command.

Regrettably, in her response, the woman goes beyond what God has actually said, “*We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’*” (v.2-3) Note the inaccurate and unnecessary addition of “nor shall you touch it”. When one is not clear on what precisely God is asking of us, it leaves open a grey zone of uncertainty—a zone where doubts and fears creep in.

To such uncertainty, the cunning serpent strikes, “*You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” (v.4-5) Here strikes the serpent, going to the heart of this exchange. Deep in our hearts, with all the freedom God has granted us, is this nagging gut feeling, this insatiable hole that we could never fill: What is it like to be the arbiter of good and evil? What is it like to be God like?

The serpent subtly insinuates that it is out of jealousy that God limits our freedom and forbids our enlightenment. To such divine tyranny, why should we obey? Why shouldn’t we think and act for ourselves? Off with the restraints! Do not let anyone, even God, define for you what is good and evil? “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” (v.6)

I don’t think it takes a pastor like me to tell you where this self-determined “good and evil” leads. It does not lead to enlightenment nor authentic freedom, but to messy divorces, confusing identities, shouting matches between willful parents and rebellious children, callousness towards the most vulnerable, dubious personal and corporate and ethics, infighting in the church, disregard for the environment, just to name a few. One does not need to go far to find our personal and communal lives failing

to flourish, simply because we refuse to accept simple limits of God's truly liberating grace.

The Apostle Paul tells this story from a very simple angle, he frames it as the disobedience of one man, Adam. "*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.*" (Romans 5:12)

Paul does not seek to place blame on the woman, Eve, as the one succumbing to the serpent's temptation, as some commentators have done in the history of biblical interpretation. Finger-pointing, after all, is what Adam sought to do as an excuse of his disobedience. Blaming others is the first sign of sinfulness entering into human hearts.

Despite our brokenness that results in our defiance of the good and gracious limits set by God, God does not respond to us by the full weight of judgement due us—God did not sentence Adam and Eve, the first human, to 'surely die'. This trace of mercy and grace would be repeated over and over again in the Scripture, in the stories of God's chosen people through history, until it comes into fullness in the story of Jesus.

Therefore, we find Paul reframing the story of Adam through that of Christ Jesus, particularly his obedience to God the Father, in embracing, however painfully, the path of the cross. "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:18-19)

I used to think God as unjust and unfair. Why should I bear the sin of Adam, the so called "the original sin"? I did not disobey! I did no wrong! The irony is that I was asking those questions during the most rebellious period in my life, when I refused to go to church, and was tempted and even embraced everything this seductive world had to offer. Now looking back, I realize how silly was I.

But this passage in Roman 5, particularly Paul's retelling the story of Adam through Jesus, was the light bulb moment in my head. Through Jesus, and his obedience, we find justification before God and reconciliation with God. Through Jesus, we find the love of God expressed in fullness, in that endearing passage of John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*"

Faith in Christ is the great equalizer that not only erases the transgressions of Adam, but brings us back to God, as God's beloved sons and daughters and everything in-between. So we believe, and trust till this day.

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